

# THE TOP TEN MYSTERIES OF THE BIBLE



HOLY  
BIBLE

REVEALED AND EXPLAINED  
JAMES BRAMLETT

# The Top Ten Mysteries of the Bible: Revealed and Explained!

James Bramlett



PublishAmerica  
Baltimore

© 2006 by James Bramlett.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publishers, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a newspaper, magazine or journal.

First printing

At the specific preference of the author, PublishAmerica allowed this work to remain exactly as the author intended, verbatim, without editorial input.

ISBN: 1-4241-4451-5  
PUBLISHED BY PUBLISHAMERICA, LLLP  
[www.publishamerica.com](http://www.publishamerica.com)  
Baltimore

Printed in the United States of America

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to:

The awesome, incomparable Creator of the universe  
of more than 100 billion galaxies,  
including our Milky Way galaxy,  
and the solar system,  
and the earth,

and me,

who has revealed Himself in the pages of the Bible,  
and who has given me His amazing, undeserved grace.

This book is a monument to Him.

The book is also dedicated to:

More of His miraculous creation:

my three wonderful and loving sons, Jim, Steve, and Scott,  
and their families, whom I love and am deeply grateful.



# Acknowledgement

It is an honor to acknowledge my dear and godly wife, Violeta (Yolly). Her love, faith, and gentle Christ-like nature are a constant inspiration, encouragement, and example to me.

The below classic lyrics by Bill and Gloria Gaither describe how God has used Yolly in my life:

*Something beautiful, Something good,  
All my confusion He understood.  
All I had to offer Him  
was loneliness and strife.  
But He made something beautiful of my life.*  
Copyright © 1971 by William J. Gaither



# Introduction

Don't you just love a good mystery? Most everyone does. And there are no greater mysteries than those in the amazing book we call the "Bible," the Holy Scriptures.

These mysteries will astonish you! That is because there is nothing like them, anywhere. They are without parallel or precedent.

The Bible's mysteries are not only intriguing, but they touch the deepest areas of our soul, and as we understand them, a light comes on in our understanding of life itself. The purpose of this book is to help you understand these mysteries, and to turn on that light.

The Bible has been described as a deep mine of treasures, continually inviting the seeker to another chamber after he has spent time in the first. In writing to his son in A.D. 412, St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) said:

Such is the depth of the Christian Scriptures that even if I were attempting to study them and nothing else from early boyhood to decrepit old age, with the utmost leisure, the most unwearied zeal, and talents greater than I have, I would still daily be making progress in discovering their treasures.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Isaac Newton (A.D. 1642-1727) is called "the father of modern science" and "the father of the industrial revolution." He was one of the greatest scientific and intellectual geniuses in all history, with possibly the highest I.Q. of any person in history. Newton was



also a Bible scholar, fluent in ancient languages, who translated directly from the original Hebrew and Greek Bible languages. He made a lifetime inquiry into the Bible's mysteries.

Newton was unusually drawn to the prophetic book of Daniel in the Bible, which he began studying at age 12 and continued until he died at age 85. In fact, *The Columbia History of the World* remarks:

At the end of his days he spent more time studying  
and writing about the prophecies in the book of  
Daniel than he did in charting the heavens.

Sir Isaac Newton zealously sought answers to some of the Bible's mysteries, which resulted in fascinating insights. For example, see Chapter 8 in this book. One of Newton's books was *The Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John*. In 1988, Thomas Jefferson's personal copy of this 1733 book was accidentally discovered in the Library of Congress by Dr. Arthur B. Robinson of Cave Junction, Oregon, who then had exact replicates printed, one of which I am privileged to possess.<sup>2</sup> (In this book, however, we will only briefly touch on Newton's insights.)

The word "mystery" actually appears 22 times in the *King James Version* of the Bible, with the plural form, "mysteries," five more times. These mysteries refer to such things as:

The kingdom of God (Mark 4:11)

The resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:51)

Christ (Ephesians 3:4)

Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32)

The gospel (Ephesians 6:19)

Iniquity (2 Thessalonians 2:7)

Godliness (1 Timothy 3:16)

The seven stars (Revelation 1:20)

These and other specific mysteries labeled as such in the Bible are the true and basic mysteries. The Top Ten Mysteries selected for this book are not an attempt to address and explain these basic mysteries but, instead, they explain the foundational *mysteries embracing all the mysteries*. They overlap them all. For example, the Top Ten Mysteries in this book are components and integral parts of several of them, such as the kingdom of God, Christ, the gospel, godliness, and others.

When you grasp the Top Ten Mysteries in this book, you will be on your way to understanding more of the other great mysteries revealed in the Bible. But we must remain humble. As St. Augustine said, we can study for a lifetime and still be unlocking treasures from God's book.

Just understanding the mysteries explained in this book will make you wise, actually wiser than many highly educated people. By grasping these Top Ten Mysteries, you will attain the highest level of intellectual awareness of the meaning of life, about which billions of people, including scholars, are in the dark.

For clarification: The Top Ten Mysteries in this book are not necessarily listed in order of importance, although in some cases there is a logical progression.

The information in this book has been described as more valuable than “*choice (or fine) gold*.”<sup>3</sup> It can benefit you daily for your entire life—and afterwards.

This book is not one of those dry, boring, lengthy theological dissertations. Its truths are the deepest in the universe, but they are explained in an easy to understand way.

Come, have fun, and explore these wonderful mysteries with me.



# Chapter 1

## The Mysterious Book

This is about the most mysterious book in the universe—the Bible.

The Bible itself has to be included among the Top Ten Mysteries because it is the source of all the other mysteries.

The Bible is shrouded in mystery, from the front to the back. Its basic message is designed for anyone to easily understand, yet serious seekers are offered endless opportunities for exploration and greater spiritual insights and understanding.

Most people have at least one copy, maybe more, but the actual contents are a great mystery to most of them. Many people who have a copy of the Bible have never read it. And when they do read it, many people do not understand it. That's where this book will help.

This mysterious book, the Bible, is the best seller of all time, of all books anywhere. It is referred to as “the Book of books.”

The Bible has been translated into more languages than any book in the world—as of 2005, at least parts of it into 2,403 languages, with 1,640 in progress, according to Wycliffe International Bible translators. By contrast, the widely popular, world famous movie classic, *Gone With the Wind*, was translated into only 35 or less languages, but this is second to *The Jesus Film*, a full-length movie on the life of Christ taken word-for-word from the Gospel of Luke,

one of the books of the Bible. *The Jesus Film* is the most translated film of any type in history—at this writing it is already in 952 languages, increasing constantly. So far *The Jesus Film* has been used to bring over 6 billion exposures to the gospel in 228 countries. This record-breaking film was a vision of my dear friend, the late Dr. Bill Bright, founder and president of Campus Crusade for Christ International.

The Bible is believed to be the first book in history ever translated, from Hebrew to Greek.

The word Bible means “books.” Actually, the Bible is a collection of books—66 of them, all inspired by God but written by some 40 different authors.

Every valid belief must have a factual basis. There are millions of opinions on almost any subject, but they are only uninformed and meaningless unless they are rooted in fact. The Bible is the root source of the faith of a plurality of the world’s population. This raises a major question.

### **Is the Bible trustworthy?**

Is the Bible a factual revelation of the Creator of the universe, or just a collection of human opinions and myths?

Are there objective reasons why millions of people, including many thousands of scholars, believe in the Bible’s total reliability, or is it just a matter of blind faith and emotion? You need to know. The entire validity of Judaism, which is based on the Old Testament, and Christianity, which is based on both the Old and New Testaments, rests upon the answer.

If it is not trustworthy, it is the greatest hoax ever fostered upon the human race, and deserves our total scorn. If it is trustworthy, it demands our utmost attention and respect. Only one attitude is incomprehensible—indifference, to strangely ignore the possibility that the Bible may contain the exclusive answers to this life and the next, as it claims.

One day a man asked his friend, “Do you know that the two biggest problems in this world are ignorance and apathy.”

The friend frowned and grumbled, “I don’t know and I don’t care.”  
Don’t be like this poor fellow! Don’t be ignorant or apathetic.

Interestingly, most people, even the apathetic and indifferent, have an opinion about the Bible, although it is often based on emotion or hearsay. But surprisingly few have systematically examined the evidence.

I once asked myself the question about the trustworthiness of the Bible, and then spent the next 40 years discovering the answer. I’ll tell you my conclusion and will summarize the extensive research generally agreed upon by thousands of scholars.

Is the Bible trustworthy? The answer is a resounding yes, for the compelling reasons below.

### **The Bible is unique**

- \* Scholars who have studied the sacred writings of the various religions report that the Bible is unique and distinctive for many reasons. Here are a few:
- \* It was written over a period of about 1,600 years, or about 40 generations.
- \* It was written in different places on three different continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- \* It was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its 40 authors were from different walks of life, including kings, fishermen, scholars, statesmen, and peasants.
- \* It includes hundreds of subjects.

Yet with the above incredible diversity, it has an amazing unity. This continuity and consistency, along with other characteristics and content as described below, make the Bible logically beyond human ability to accomplish. *The presence and influence of an external Guiding Hand are necessary.*

Another unique and undoubtedly miraculous feature is the Bible’s *survivability*. It has withstood attacks not given to any other book, vicious attacks from despots, doubters, and skeptics throughout the ages and around the world.

Despots hate the freedom it gives to the human spirit and the

worship it reserves for God instead of the state or its leader. From the days of the Roman emperors to present-day fascists, communists, and religious tyrants, the Bible has been outlawed and attempts have been made to stamp it out. Over 200 years ago, the famous French writer Voltaire predicted the Bible's soon demise. After his death, the Geneva Bible Society used Voltaire's printing press to publish more Bibles!

*"God cannot be mocked,"*<sup>1</sup> the Bible says. Ironically, sometime after he died, Voltaire's body was stolen and placed on a garbage heap, his brains and heart missing. But the Bible's popularity only flourished.

Doubters are often motivated by the Bible's moral imperatives. One popular modern-day intellectual and professor admitted the Bible's truth but then said he was forced to reject it because to accept it would condemn his "lifestyle." It was known by some of the students that he was involved with immorality. That professor has since passed on into eternity.

Intellectual pride is a factor and has become institutionalized, permeating many universities, including theological seminaries. Peer pressure forces almost blind adherence to the false hypotheses of "higher criticism" to try to prove the Bible writers as either ignorant or liars. Upon receiving solid evidence from an unusually bright student that a popular such theory was in error, one theology professor agreed but then shockingly replied, "But I have been teaching it too long to change."

Human pride causes much opposition. The idea is abhorrent to many that their moral condition would cause the need for mercy from the Supreme Being, a need of every human, according to the Bible. They see their outwardly ethical behavior as qualifying them for favor from Almighty God, in a sense making them His moral equal, or Him their debtor.

In spite of these unparalleled attacks to destroy it, the Bible has survived as the most authentic and accurate ancient document in existence, based on both age and number of original manuscripts

available. For example, Homer's *Iliad* has 643 manuscripts available, with the earliest copy written about 400 years after the original. The book, *Natural History*, by Pliny Secundus, has seven manuscript copies available with a 750-year gap between the earliest copy and the original text. There are only about 10 good manuscripts of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* available and the earliest was written over 900 years after the original. By contrast, there are currently 24,970 manuscript copies of the New Testament available, with one early fragment written only 50 years from the original, whole books with only a 100-year gap, and the entire New Testament with only a 225-250-year gap from the original text to the earliest available copy.

Shakespeare's 37 plays are only about 200 years old but there are said to be about 100 significant textual variants that are a subject of scholarly dispute. By contrast, the New Testament is about 1,900 years old and it is estimated that there are only 20 or less such passages. Do we ever hear doubt of the reliability of Shakespeare's work? The Bible critics blatantly use a double standard.

Little-known fact: *If the same tests were applied to all available ancient literature, the Bible would clearly be hailed as by far the most reliable, or else all other ancient literature, including the classics, would have to be rejected as unreliable!*

### **The Bible claims itself to be divinely inspired**

A major and unique aspect of the Bible is its own consistent claim to be divinely inspired. The Bible claims itself to be "the Word of God." But more than claiming divine inspiration, in the Bible God even speaks in the first person! Expressions such as "And God said..." followed by a quote from God appear about 3,800 times in the Old Testament alone.

These claims and characteristics are in a book which espouses truth, morality, and all that is good. It is illogical that it would be a hoax, and a conspiracy is impossible because of the vast differences in time and place of the writers and events. Also, of the large number of people involved, someone would have surely exposed such a



hoax, a victim of the good conscience he preached. But beyond this convincing logic, there are more objective reasons that argue for the divine inspiration of the Bible.

### **Prophecy confirms the Bible's truth**

Prophecy, or the prediction of future events, gives the Bible an internal authenticity. This is one of the great marvels of the Bible, one that distinguishes it from all other writings. Prophets spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about future events, especially concerning Israel, the nations, the Messiah, and the church. The events have occurred without fail as they were predicted.

Unlike modern-day psychics whose track record on predictions is usually no more than chance would provide, the ancient Hebrew prophets could not make a mistake. They were 100 percent accurate, the only such group in the history of the world. This confirms the divine origin of their information. Through them, God revealed His plans, from early history to the end of time, and they wrote it as they were inspired.

For example, about 600 years before Christ, the prophet Ezekiel predicted details about the destruction of the city of Tyre.<sup>2</sup> Its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar came just a few years later. History has shown the prophecy's amazing details to have happened: Tyre became a "bare rock" where fishermen spread their nets, and the city was never rebuilt. There were many other prophecies and fulfillments concerning various locations and people, such as Sidon, Samaria, Edom, and Nineveh. Many prophecies foretold the historical plight of the Hebrew people, their first dispersion in 586 B.C. and return under Ezra, and their later dispersion by the Romans and worldwide persecution foretold by Christ that occurred in A.D. 70. It was also foretold that they would someday return to their land from all over the earth. Seeing this, the prophet Isaiah had written:

*Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment?<sup>3</sup>*

Now, almost 2,000 years after the Jewish dispersion, the United Nations, in an unprecedented action, mandated the reestablishment of the nation of Israel. Born “in one day,” May 14, 1948, modern Israel is a stunning fulfillment of Bible prophecy in modern times.

It seems incomprehensible, but many people, including many clergy, assign no importance to Bible prophecy and know little about it, even though it comprises an extremely large percentage of Scripture. Someone has counted that the Bible contains 1,817 individual predictions concerning 737 separate subjects found in 8,352 verses. These numerous predictions comprise a full 27 percent of the 31,124 verses in the entire Bible. Multitudes of biblical scholars over the last 2000 years have explored many of these prophecies and their detailed fulfillments, as proven by ample historical evidence. How can any serious student or teacher of the Bible ignore 27 percent of the book?

The most profound and intriguing prophecies concern the Messiah. Scholars count nearly 300 prophetic passages in the Old Testament (Jewish Bible) that refer to Jesus’ first coming, such as His virgin birth, His birthplace, the actual time of His coming, His miracles, His suffering and resurrection, and many others. This will be discussed in the next chapters.

### **Archaeology confirms the Bible’s truth**

The relatively new science of archaeology is confirming the utmost accuracy of the Scriptures as previously unknown records and artifacts are uncovered.

For centuries, some people doubted certain details of the Bible, such as the existence of certain ancient peoples and places that seemed in conflict with available knowledge. But by faith alone, the devoted would always cling to the Bible’s truth because they were convinced that it was “inspired.” Now, just in our generation, doubts have been put aside one-by-one by researchers combing and digging over ancient sites.

For example, the Old Testament refers to a city that was built from solid rock. Skeptics would scoff about the reality of this

unknown city, but Petra has been discovered and is now a major tourist stop in Jordan.

In the New Testament, in Acts 13:7, Luke speaks of a “proconsul” who was the governor of Cyprus. For years many scholars thought that Luke had made a mistake in terminology because the Roman government was thought to have used the title “proprietor” instead. Recently, however, archaeology has determined that Rome did, in fact, use the title as mentioned by Luke. The scoffing critics were found to be in error as they have time after time.

The late scholar, Dr. W. A. Criswell, pointed out that about 200 years ago a group of French scholars listed 82 alleged “errors” in the Bible that would eventually destroy Christianity. Since then, however, archaeology and the increased understanding of the ancient languages and cultural contexts have resolved each item, while those same “scholars” have passed on into eternity, facing the very reality they rejected.<sup>4</sup>

**Bible historicity.** In ignorance and pride, detractors often scoff at the accuracy of the historic details given in the Bible, even including the account in the Gospels about the life of Jesus Christ. They produce their own fictitious accounts, such as *The Da Vinci Code* book and movie, the book, *The Jesus Papers*, and the spurious *Gospel of Judas*, to purposely undermine and discredit God’s truths. But, in fact, the Bible contains impeccably accurate history. One can only guess what the motivations of these detractors might be, other than making money, but the Bible contains the most reliable and accurate history in the world. It would be wise to believe it.

### **Christ Himself confirms the Bible’s truth**

The testimony of Jesus Christ Himself confirms the Bible. Even His detractors extol His saintliness and wisdom, incapable of deception and misrepresentation. Christ believed and taught the infallibility and reliability of the Scriptures, even rebuking those who did not believe! He repeatedly said such things as: “*It is written... Search the Scriptures... Have you read?... Scripture cannot be broken.*”

He spoke confidently and unashamedly of Old Testament events and people, such as Noah and the ark, Jonah and the whale, Abraham, and Moses. He also said that *the story of His own life and purpose were prophetically and symbolically woven through all these actual events hundreds of years before.*

Jesus did not teach that just the principles or basic message of the Scriptures were inspired, or even just the words. He spoke of the accuracy of even the “jot” and “tittle,” the smallest characters of the Hebrew alphabet.

And it wasn’t just in His human life that Jesus believed and taught the infallibility of the Scriptures. He did so even after the resurrection when He rebuked the disciples as “*slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*”<sup>5</sup> (Not some, but *all!*)

Of course, in Jesus’ day there was no New Testament. There was only what we call the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible. But Jesus knew the New Testament was forthcoming, and He placed His stamp of authority on it *by anticipation* when He told His disciples:

*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*<sup>6</sup>

### **Scientific proof of the Bible’s truth?**

The Bible does not claim to be a science book, yet it contains scientific truth, revealed supernaturally to its writers centuries before modern science discovered those truths.

For example, only in relative recent years has science understood the cycles of water, how it evaporates, then collects in the clouds, then comes back to earth as rain or snow. However, God revealed this thousands of years ago in Job 36:27-28:

*He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind.*

Another example is the biblical revelation that the earth is round, and not flat, as believed until recent history. Some 2,700 years ago, Isaiah wrote, referring to God:

*He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.*<sup>7</sup>

Another example is the actual life of our physical being in our blood:

*For the life of a creature is in the blood.*<sup>8</sup>

When the Bible does address a scientific matter that may seem contrary to today's understanding, it would be wise to believe it. A contemporary example is the theory of evolution that man evolved from some prehistoric, random collision of molecules, then apes which even contradicts known scientific principles and the fossil record, but yet is foolishly taught as truth in our educational systems by those who do not want to acknowledge a moral God to whom they are accountable.

As today's children are taught that they descended from sea slime, then monkeys, and that life has no meaning, is it any wonder that many of them have no respect for life, either in the womb or in the streets, or even their own, as teenage suicide rates have skyrocketed in recent years?

A recent study showed that more teenagers and young adults died of suicide than from other major diseases combined. Society is paying a horrific price for rejecting God and His Word.

I have seen the actual statistical charts on this and other social breakdowns and, amazingly, the trend lines began to dramatically spike upward in the year 1962. What could have happened in 1962? That happened to be the year the U. S. Supreme Court declared God unconstitutional, and that He had no place in our public schools. Violating two centuries of legal precedent and tradition, the Court delivered, with *Engel v. Vitale*, a ruling separating Christian principles from education for the first time in history, removing prayer from our schools. The prayer that caused the great controversy was a simple, nonsectarian, 22-word prayer. Take a look at it and consider what this nation has lost since its words were declared illegal and banned: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence on thee and we beg thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country."

America, and the world, desperately need an answer to that missing prayer!

**The scientist Isaac Newton and the Bible.** Previously, we mentioned the brilliant Sir Isaac Newton, called by some the greatest scientist who ever lived. Scientist Dr. Arthur B. Robinson wrote:

Isaac Newton believed that the Bible is literally true in every respect. Throughout his life, he continually tested Biblical truth against the physical truths of experimental and theoretical science. He never observed a contradiction. In fact, he viewed his own scientific work as a method by which to reinforce belief in Biblical truth.<sup>9</sup>

Some who have studied his life claim that Newton held unorthodox views of Bible doctrine. The matter is complex and cannot be explored or resolved in this small space; however, the claim has been disputed by astronomer Dr. James N. Hanson, who studied Newton's works extensively and concluded:

In my reading of what Newton himself wrote, and by analyzing the claims of his biographer detractors, I find Newton to be a Bible-believing Christian who would be comfortable attending my small, semi-rural, blue-collar Baptist church.<sup>9A</sup>

### **Mathematical proof of the Bible's truth?**

Now here's an intriguing mystery for you!

Possible mathematical proof of divine inspiration is one of the most mysterious subjects. The field needs much more research and previous research needs recognition. However, beginning at least as early as the 1,800s and through today, mathematically-gifted people have made exhaustive studies in the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the Bible manuscripts. These researchers claim that results prove that the writings had to come from an omniscient Mind.

One person who studied this phenomenon was a Russian immigrant and Harvard graduate, Dr. Ivan Panin, who spent 50 years and accumulated 43,000 pages of notes on the subject before he died in 1942. <sup>10</sup> A more recently published work on the subject is *Theomatics*, by Jerry Lucas and Del Washburn.<sup>11</sup>

In both Hebrew and Greek, numbers are not separate characters but are represented by letters of the alphabet. For example, the first

letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*, and the first letter of the Greek alphabet, *alpha* are also the number one in both languages. Panin and others have taken the original Bible manuscripts and have assigned the appropriate numerical value to each letter. Then they looked for numerical patterns. The results they report are mind-boggling—patterns of numbers that could not have been done by humans, and probability theory analysis shows such an elaborate accident as totally impossible. For example, in just the first verse of the Bible, Panin found 30 different patterns of the number seven. In English, this verse has ten words, but in the original Hebrew it has only seven. The seven words have exactly 28 ( $4 \times 7$ ) letters. The nouns in the sentence add to a combined 777 ( $111 \times 7$ ). The two objects of the verb both have seven letters, and so on. The chance of 30 combinations of seven in a seven-word sentence happening accidentally is described as 1 in 33,000,000,000,000!

Lucas, a Phi Beta Kappa scholar, and Washburn report similar and numerous examples in the Greek New Testament manuscripts, and their book includes a 79-page chapter on just their statistical and probability methodology to satisfy sincere and serious doubters. They state unequivocally that their study “scientifically proves that God wrote the Bible.”

Such patterns as discovered by Panin, Lucas, Washburn and others are said to appear throughout both the Old and New Testaments and reportedly have not been found in any other writing anywhere. This is not numerology, an occult practice, but simply seeking the numerical equivalents of the letters that God put in His Word.

**Surprise discovery in Israel.** In a startling announcement carried by the Associated Press, researchers at the Israel Institute of Technology have discovered a similar, but different, phenomenon. Using computer analysis of the first five books of the Bible, or Jewish Torah, they have discovered odd patterns of hidden words with coded intervals, called “equidistant letter spacing” (ELS). For example, in the Book of Genesis, the Hebrew word “Torah” (Law) is found repeated by letters at 50-character intervals and “Elohim”

(God) at 26-character intervals. The word “holocaust” is reportedly found at 50-character intervals in Deuteronomy, a book that predicts great future persecution for the Israelite people (chapters 28-31). It would have been impossible for a mortal to have done this, and statistically such an accident would have been impossible, the researchers say. “We need a non-rational explanation. And ours is that (it) was written by God through the hand of Moses,” says computer expert, Menachem Wiener, of the Institute.<sup>12</sup>

In all of this, it appears that the omniscient Creator left a most unusual and persuasive signature on His Word. It makes the apostle Paul’s statement even more graphic and awesome:

*All Scripture is God-breathed....*<sup>13</sup>

Is the Bible trustworthy? We have not even mentioned the reality of its truths that have been experienced by hundreds of millions of people over the centuries. But the collective evidence that we have included overwhelmingly supports the fact that the Bible is God’s unique and, as it claims, exclusive and totally reliable message to the human race. We must not ignore it.

### **Conclusion**

The Bible-based Christian faith is not a blind faith, but is based on indisputable historical facts, proving its truth. The Bible is self-authenticating. Rational humans should put every belief system to a similar rigorous examination.

### **Understanding the Bible**

The Bible is a collection of history, biography, poetry, prophecy, spiritual and practical principles, and actual commandments from God to the human race.

Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Son of God, is at the heart and center of the Bible. The Old Testament points to Him and sets the stage for His arrival, and the New Testament describes His coming. The Old Testament predicts and the New Testament fulfills those predictions.

Christ’s appearance on the earth is the central event in the Bible and all history, divided into four major sub-events: His birth, His earthly ministry, His crucifixion, and His resurrection.

The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New



Testament is the Old Testament revealed. God gave us both for the full picture of His plan of redemption from creation in the first book of the Bible, to the last chapter in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, which ends with the description of the eternal holy city.

There are many things in the Bible that are difficult to understand. That is because the Bible is revelation from the infinite Mind. It is the Word of the living God.

Also, the Bible reveals that God desires “seekers.” He wants us to seek Him and His truth. And when we read it, we are plumbing the depths of the infinite. We should not despair if we do not understand everything. No one does.

Here are some principles that will help you to understand the deeper messages of the Bible.

Approach it prayerfully, and know that only God can unlock its mysteries for you.

Avoid interpreting passages out of context. (However, God may speak to us personally out of context, which I have experienced.)

Compare difficult passages with passages that are clear and look for consistent truths or themes.

Consider the historical context.

Use a good modern translation, and a lexicon or commentary to clarify unfamiliar words and concepts.

### **Words of power**

There is great power of the Holy Spirit latent in the words of the Bible, sometimes transmitted by just making a decision to believe it, which was demonstrated early in Billy Graham’s ministry. At that time back in the 1940s, Graham was struggling with questions he had about the Bible for which he did not have answers. But one day he got on his knees and prayed, “Father, I am going to accept this as thy Word—by *faith*!” This simple act of sincere faith released a power in Graham’s ministry he had not before known and soon catapulted him and his ministry to proclaim the gospel to worldwide audiences for decades. His life is a testimony of that power.

As you may make a similar, willful decision, and pray a similar

prayer, a new power will be released in your life, and you and the world around you will never be the same.

God's power is limitless, and even more power will be released in your life as you continue to read, believe, and act upon God's promises. For a full discussion of God's power—what it is, how to get it, and how to release it—see my powerful book, *The Power!* (Xulon Press, 2003), available through bookstores or online book sellers, or from the publisher at <http://www.xulonpress.com/bookstore>.

### Words of wisdom

It has been said that all great leaders, who are wise, regularly depend upon the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

**General George Washington**, our first President and father of our country, said, "It is impossible to rightly govern... without God and the Bible."

**John Adams**, second President of the United States, said, "Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited. Every member would be obliged in conscience, to temperance, frugality, and industry; to justice, kindness, and charity towards his fellow men; and to piety, love, and reverence toward Almighty God... What a Utopia, what a Paradise would this region be!"

**Thomas Jefferson**, third President of the United States, said, "The Bible is the cornerstone of liberty... students' perusal of the sacred volume will make us better citizens."

**Andrew Jackson**, seventh President of the United States, referring to the Bible: "That book, Sir, is the Rock upon which our republic rests."

**Abraham Lincoln**, 16th President of the United States, said:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow...and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history: that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.”

Schuyler Colfax, who later became Vice President of the United States, said that Lincoln would often get up as early as 4 a.m. in order that he might have time to read his Bible and pray before visitors would begin to arrive at the White House. On one occasion, Lincoln said:

That the Almighty does make use of human agencies, and directly intervenes in human affairs, is one of the plainest statements of the Bible. I have had so many evidences of His direction, so many instances when I have been controlled by some other power than my own, that I cannot doubt that this power comes from above.

On April 14, 1865, just five days after the Civil War had ended, Abraham Lincoln went to Ford's Theatre with his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln. She recalled his last words as they sat there:

He said he wanted to visit the Holy Land and see those places hallowed by the footprints of the Saviour. He was saying there was no city he so much desired to see as Jerusalem. And with the words half spoken on his tongue, the bullet of the assassin entered the brain, and the soul of the great and good President was carried by the angels to the New Jerusalem above.

**General Ulysses S. Grant**, 18th President: “I believe in the Holy Scriptures, and whoso lives by them will be benefited thereby....”

**Calvin Coolidge**, 30th President: “The foundations of our society and our government rest so much on the teachings of the

Bible that it would be difficult to support them if faith in these teachings would cease to be practically universal in our country.”

**Herbert Hoover**, 31st President: “The whole inspiration of our civilization springs from the teachings of Christ and the lessons of the prophets. To read the Bible for these fundamentals is a necessity of American life.”

**Dwight David Eisenhower**, 34th President: “The purpose of a devout and united people was set forth in the pages of the Bible... (1) to live in freedom, (2) to work in a prosperous land....and (3) to obey the commandments of God....The biblical story of the Promised Land inspired the founders of America. It continues to inspire us.”

**General Douglas MacArthur**, feeling uneasy one evening before a major battle in the Pacific during World War II, turned to his Bible, which was his regular practice, and read until he felt at peace. Then the general went to bed and slept soundly, even though the battle the next day would play a significant role in the course in the war.

**Why the Bible?** Why did these and thousands of other leaders, and also scholars and vast numbers of lay people, choose the Bible? Why not Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, or one of the many great novels?

The answer is clear: The Bible is God’s Word to man. It can bring pardon, peace, purpose, power, comfort, insights, and guidance as no other book in the world can do. The leaders named above knew this, as have many other great leaders and others down throughout history.

If the Bible is so vital that even great leaders turn to it in times of crisis, all of us should no less turn to it in our everyday lives.

### **Words of life**

In the Bible you will find words of the Spirit, for your spirit.<sup>15</sup>  
God says:

*My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.*<sup>16</sup>

You will find who you are, where you came from, where you are going, and how to get there. No other book or source anywhere in the world has that information.

*You will find yourself* and the meaning of life.

You will also discover the most mysterious Person ever to visit the planet, whom we describe in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 2

# The Mysterious Trinity

Is there only one God, hundreds as the ancient Greeks believed, or millions as Hindus believe, or something in between?

Or what about the New Agers? Many of them believe every person is god, which would give us more than 6 billion gods now, and counting. One popular New Age movie star once stood on a mountaintop and audaciously shouted out to the whole universe in front of her, “I am God.”

That is worse than a tiny termite standing on a housetop and shouting, “I am king of the world.”

The movie star reminds me of a pastor’s famous reminder one day to his congregation, “There is a God, and you’re not Him!”

If there is more than one god, how do they make a decision? Do they have meetings? Do they take a vote? Is anyone in charge? This may sound silly, but such questions logically arise.

At first glance, the answer to all this may seem a mystery, but after reviewing what the Bible says and what God says about Himself, the mystery is easily resolved.

### **God is One**

The Bible gives us the easy answer with this classic verse:

*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD<sup>1</sup>*

**Composite oneness.** However, the word *one* in the above verse is from the Hebrew word *echad*, meaning a “composite oneness,” “diversity of unity,” or “unified oneness,” rather than the absolute number “one.” It is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 where the husband and wife are commanded to be one flesh. This presents a problem for anti-Trinitarians because the word *yachid*, the main Hebrew word for solitary oneness, is never used in the Scriptures in reference to God. However, in a telling move, shortly after the rise of Christianity, Jews removed *echad* from the verse quoted above and added in its place the word *yachid*. A commentator has said that it must be most troubling for Jews that their word of choice (*yachid*) to describe God’s oneness is never actually used in the Bible.

Although a composite oneness, we know that God is one—a great truth called “monotheism” that even Islam embraces, even though Muslims reject or twist the great truths of the Bible. Their “Allah” has no similarity to the God of the Bible and in spite of what some may think is clearly not the same Person, and their Qur’an (Koran) is in sharp disagreement with the Bible. Both cannot be true. Make your choice.

Even Hindus believe their millions of gods are really different facets or manifestations of one truth called Brahman, although the complex concept of Brahman bears no resemblance to the way the Creator has revealed Himself in the Bible.

From the Scriptures, both Jews and Christians know there is only one God. Yet from the above verse and many others we find a mystery about His infinite nature, a tri-part plurality that the finite mind cannot understand. Historic Christianity and its theologians refer to this mysterious, monotheistic plurality as the “Trinity.”

The truth of the Trinity is that God is indeed one, but also three in one, and one in three. The Bible speaks of (1) Father, (2) Son, and (2) Holy Spirit as all constituting the one godhead. They are the one true God, in three manifestations.

The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible, but the concept and truth clearly are. And neither is the word “Bible” in the Bible, but we know it is a reality. Typically, traditional Jews reject the concept of the

Trinity because an admission of its truth would be agreeing that Jesus was God in human form, a foundational biblical truth, which ironically is even revealed in their own Hebrew Scriptures, as explained below. Some cults also reject the truth of the Trinity for the same reason.

### **The evidence**

How do we know that God is one but three, and three but one? There is much evidence. Here are some examples.

**In the beginning.** The very first verse in the Bible says, *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”* <sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for God is *Elohim*, which is a plural noun.

In the very first chapter, the Bible says, *“And God (Elohim) said, Let us make man in our image”* <sup>3</sup> (emphasis supplied). Note the words *us* and *our*, not *me* and *my*. *Us* and *our* mean more than one person.

Since we are made in God’s image, it is not surprising that we too are tri-part beings. The Bible reveals that we are one but three: spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). We are a spirit, we have a soul (mind, will, emotions), and we live in a body.

**Key prophecies.** Several hundred years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah prophesied His coming when he said, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”*<sup>4</sup> The word *Immanuel* in Hebrew means “God with us.” Isaiah was saying that when Jesus comes, He would be “God with us.” That could not be more clear. Case closed. However, let’s look at other evidence.

When Jesus came and fulfilled that prophecy, He was, indeed, “God with us,” confirmed in Matthew 1:23 in the New Testament, describing Jesus’ birth: *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us.’”*



Isaiah the prophet also said this about the coming Messiah (Jesus): *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (emphasis supplied.)<sup>5</sup>

Note that the prophecy reveals that He, the Messiah (Jesus), “will be called” (1) God, (2) Father, (3) Prince, as well as (4) Counselor, the word used for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (called Holy Ghost in *King James Version*). Here in this one verse written several hundred years before Jesus’ birth, we have all three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—all referred to as “*He*” and mentioned as one Person. Case closed again. But let’s continue.

**Jesus’ words.** Jesus said, *“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*<sup>6</sup> The Counselor, or Holy Spirit, is not an “it” or a mere “force,” such as the fictional, impersonal “Force” of *Star Wars* fame, as some cults teach. Instead, He is a Person, a real Person, and part of the Godhead. Proof is that personal pronouns are used to refer to Him. *“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”*<sup>7</sup> That “he” is the Holy Spirit of God—God Himself.

In describing Himself, Jesus made these astonishing statements: *“I and the Father are one,”*<sup>8</sup> and *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*<sup>9</sup>

**Paul’s words.** The apostle Paul had deep revelations from God, and in this God-inspired passage he writes about Jesus:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was*

*pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.<sup>10</sup>*

**Other evidence of Christ's deity.**

Micah 5:2 speaks of Messiah's pre-existence.

Hebrews 1:6 says that all the angels worship Him, and the Bible would never command worship of anyone but God.

Psalms 2:12 directs worship of the Son.

In Zechariah 12:10, it is God who says, *"They will look on me, the one they have pierced."* God is speaking of Himself being pierced, and He obviously had to be in the flesh in the Person of Christ in order to be pierced!

In John 20:28, when the doubting disciple, Thomas, saw evidence that Christ had been resurrected, he worshipped Him and exclaimed, *"My Lord and my God."*

In John 8:58, Jesus said He existed before Abraham, who lived some 2,000 earlier, and said He was the "I am" of the Old Testament.

In Luke 6:5, He said He is "Lord of the Sabbath."

As His second coming, He will judge all nations and all people (Matthew 25:31-32). Such judgment is reserved for God alone.

Luke 7:48 reveals that Jesus forgives sins, a function only of God.

Jesus equates Himself with the Father: *"He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."*<sup>11</sup> This is an ominous truth for those who reject the deity of Christ. They are dishonoring the Father.

**Attempts to explain**

Many human analogies attempt to explain the Trinity. It has been said that the Father is God invisible, the Son is God manifested, and the Spirit is God in interaction with His creation.

Or, someone has said it is like the three forms of H<sub>2</sub>O all being the same: water, ice, and steam—liquid, solid, and gas—all of the same substance.

But all such analogies are woefully inaccurate. Our finite brains cannot fully understand our infinite Creator. If we could, that would bring down to our level the One who spoke and over 100 billion galaxies were created.

Author Judson Cornwall says:

The Scripture teaches that there are not three Gods... there is but one God who has chosen to reveal Himself to us in three forms, and has never been separated from Himself except for the brief interval at the cross when the Father turned His face from the Son. It was this separation between the Father and the Son that was the true agony of the cross; not the square Roman nails, not the aftermath of the whipping post, nor the poisonous crown of thorns, nor the disjointing of arms and legs as the cross was dropped into the ground. The physical agony of the crucifixion was nothing to be compared with the separation in the Godhead occasioned by Christ's vicarious bearing of our sins in His own body on that cross. It was both the first and the last separation that the Godhead will ever know.<sup>12</sup>

### **The importance of the Trinity**

It has been said that if you try to understand the Trinity, you will lose your mind, and if you reject the Trinity, you will lose your soul! The soul part is that serious, because to reject the Trinity one must reject the Father, the Son, and/or the Holy Spirit. Also,

most anti-Trinity people do not believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, a prerequisite for salvation according to Romans 10:9, where the word "Lord" is from the Greek word for the Hebrew name of God, YHWH, in the Old Testament (see Chapter 7). The verse says:

*If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' (or "Jesus is YHWH," or God) and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

The Greek word for "saved" in this verse is *sozo*, which according to the *Strong's Enhanced Lexicon* not only means saved from destruction, but also healed, restored to health, and preserved from danger. It is clear that what we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths is a far more important determinant in our lives than most people realize.

Why is such a confession so important as to determine one's eternal destiny? Because the Bible says the mouth speaks what is in the heart.<sup>13</sup>

God cannot allow entrance into Paradise and His eternal presence people who in their hearts deny and refuse to confess the revelation of His appearance on earth to shed His own blood for us. Not only would they be in heaven illegitimately, without an atonement for their sins, they would also be very unhappy around everyone praising Jesus all the time.

There are main three reasons why some people reject the Trinity, none of which is biblical. In spite of all the abundant revelation:

They reject the Son as God in human form, which is incomprehensible, or...

They reject the Father, which is just as incomprehensible, or...

They reject the Holy Spirit, also incomprehensible.

You cannot know God the Father unless you know God the Son. Jesus said, *"No one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, if anyone says he knows God but rejects Jesus as God in the flesh, you can know he is not telling the truth but is deceived by some man-made religion or cult.

This is why Jesus said, *"No one comes to the Father except through me."*<sup>15</sup> And God the Holy Spirit reveals all this to us: *"No one... can say, 'Jesus is Lord' (YHWH or God), except by the Holy Spirit."*<sup>16</sup> Here are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together to bring us into relationship with our Creator. The Holy Spirit reveals and introduces us to the Son, and the Son gives us access to the Father.

We must faithfully believe and accept what is revealed to us by the divine authority of the Word of God, and be thankful for divine revelation.

In awe and praise, let us remember the triune nature of the Creator whenever we sing the classic 17<sup>th</sup> century Doxology:

*Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;*

*Praise Him, all creatures here below;*

*Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;*

*Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Thomas Ken, 1674

## Chapter 3

# The Mysterious Incarnation

This is about the most spectacular event in all history—the *incarnation*.

What does it mean?

The term “incarnation” means God becoming incarnate, in human form, or in human flesh. Could there be a greater mystery? Can you imagine the great Creator of the whole universe appearing in a human body?

The previous chapter about the Trinity introduced the idea. This chapter adds to the truth.

The Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 1, 2, and 14 best describes it with these mysterious words, where “Word” is from the Greek *logos* and is used to refer to God:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (emphasis supplied).

The Creator God not only became incarnate and took on human flesh, but He visited Planet Earth “through a back door,” so to speak, as His austere birth circumstances and life were described by the late Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. With incomparable magnanimity, the Almighty Creator displayed ultimate humility and servanthood, which He not only lived as an example but commanded us to emulate.

### **The Hindu and the anthill**

This story about a man from India, told by the late Dr. Bill Bright, might help some understand the incarnation.

The man was a devout member of a Hindu sect, and because of his belief in reincarnation, he had such a profound sense of reverence for life he would not kill any living creature, not even an ant, thinking it might be some departed relative.

Through some friends, he was confronted with the claims of Christ, but he could not grasp the idea of the incarnation—that God actually visited this planet in the flesh. He could not comprehend how the Creator of the universe could become a man, or why.

One day as he was walking in a field meditating upon this new truth, he was wondering how this could possibly be. He ran across a large anthill with thousands of little ants scurrying about as they do. Always interested in living things, he stopped to watch. As he observed what amazing little creatures they are, he suddenly heard a tremendous noise. He looked up and discovered it was the noise of a large tractor plowing the field—and coming in his direction!

He realized that the tractor would soon be plowing through that anthill and thousands of ants would probably be killed and their home destroyed. He was gripped with concern and became frantic. He wanted to warn them of their impending destruction.

He thought to himself, “How can I warn them? If I could write in the sand, they wouldn’t be able to read it. If I shouted to them, they wouldn’t understand me. The only possible way I could communicate with them would be by becoming an ant, if I had that ability.”

Then suddenly he had a revelation from the Spirit of God. He saw why God, the Creator of the universe, chose to become one of us by becoming a man, in the Person of the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth.

Through his experience with the anthill, the light suddenly came on in the heart of that Hindu man, and now he understood the incarnation.

Of course, the incarnation had a much greater and more sublime purpose than just communicating with us, as we shall see, but that is part of it.

### **One solitary life**

If God did, in fact, become a human, He would no doubt be the most unusual and influential human the world has ever known. Therefore, consider the unusual Person described in the classic essay, *One Solitary Life*:

Here was a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his feet inside a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself. While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth—his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone and today he is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever were built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.<sup>1</sup>

### **An unusual Jew**

The above is a fascinating and intriguing description, and a true one. But unfortunately, it leaves out two major points and thus falls far short. The person described was more than just an obscure man who left a major impact on the world. *He actually claimed to be God in human form, and was resurrected from the dead!*

God in human form? An astonishing thought. But polls show a majority of respondents in 20th-century America believe it. And I suspect most of the rest have never really investigated the evidence, which is overwhelming.

Who really is this mysterious Person?

He is a Jew named Yeshua, better known in English as Jesus. You've probably heard something about Him, but if you are like most people there are probably many startling things you have never been told or thought about. Consider:

1. Jesus claimed to fulfill all the Hebrew prophecies of the coming Messiah and did.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, scholars count nearly 300 prophetic passages in the Old Testament (Jewish Bible) that refer to Jesus—His virgin birth, His birthplace, the time of His coming, His miracles, His suffering and resurrection, and many others. What are the “odds” that such prophecies could be fulfilled by “chance” in Jesus or any other person? One scholar has calculated the odds for just eight prophecies fulfilled in one person as 1 in  $10^{17}$ , or 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. For 48 of them, the odds would be 1 in  $10^{157}$ , or 157 zeros! In other words, it would be virtually impossible.

2. He claimed to be the same one who had revealed Himself to Moses in Egypt centuries before, meaning His life transcended time.<sup>3</sup>

3. He claimed to be the bodily form of God the Father.<sup>4</sup>

4. He claimed to forgive sins.<sup>5</sup>

5. He reinterpreted and clarified the Ten



Commandments, revealing the intent or “spirit” of the law and not just the letter of it.<sup>6</sup>

6. He predicted His own death and resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

7. He received and accepted worship through the titles of “Lord,” and “God.”<sup>8</sup>

8. He predicted a second, and next time majestic visitation to the earth at an undesignated time in the future to usher in a new era.<sup>9</sup>

9. He claimed to be the final judge of the whole world and each person in it.<sup>10</sup>

10. He claimed the authority to grant a never-ending existence in a paradise-like environment to those who recognize His identity and put their trust in Him.<sup>11</sup>

11. Whether one likes it or not, or whether or not it would be considered “intolerant” by modern standards, He unmistakably claimed exclusivity—that He is the only way (a concept made understandable by Chapters 4 and 5 of this book).<sup>12</sup>

12. He backed his words with displays of power over nature never seen on the earth, before or since.<sup>13</sup>

13. As He predicted, three days after His execution He was resurrected, of which we have many eyewitness accounts. He was reportedly seen by more than 500 people.<sup>14</sup>

14. All the above is documented in what is considered the most amazingly preserved and reliable ancient document in existence (see Chapter 1). Also, this real and dynamic truth has been experienced in billions of lives for 2,000 years.

### **Just a great moral teacher?**

Satisfied? Or do you still think that perhaps Jesus was just a good man, or a great teacher, or maybe just one of many prophets? Some who are not aware of His claims, or the evidence, or who have not thought it through may think that. But such an idea is logically

insupportable, according to the late Cambridge University professor and British author, C.S. Lewis, who incisively concluded with these classic words:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit on him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>15</sup>

To paraphrase Lewis: Considering the things that Jesus said about Himself, He would have to be a complete *liar*, a hopeless *lunatic*, or the exalted *Lord*, and there is no rational basis for the first two.

Each person must make his choice about Jesus: *liar*, *lunatic*, or *Lord*? One's decision has eternal consequences, for reasons explained in this book. Do not make that decision lightly but only with the most serious deliberation of the facts.

Napoleon Bonaparte's words summarize a prevailing view of Jesus:

I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world is no possible term of comparison.<sup>16</sup>

While truth does not always win the popularity contest and is really not dependent upon a poll or a vote, it is significant that data show in the world today there are more people who claim Christianity than any other religion. According to data from the U.S. Center for World Mission, in the year 2000, 33 percent of the world's population claimed Christianity as their faith, a strong plurality, with second place going to Islam with only 19.6 percent. Hinduism was

third with 13.4 percent, and Buddhism only had 5.9 percent.

Skewing the data is that in many cultures religious faith is automatically identified with nationality, where deviance is a death sentence, and there is often no informed personal belief and commitment. Other religious cultures are often closed and repressive toward other beliefs. By contrast, typically in Christianized cultures there is relative freedom of religion and expression. The true God gives liberty to accept or reject Him, whereas man-made religions typically do not—it is “believe as we say” or else persecution, or even “off with your head.”

### **Critical distinctions**

There are great distinctions between Yeshua, or Jesus, and all others who are considered “religious founders,” even though Jesus did not come to start a religion, but to reveal God, His love, and His plan. Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship.

The 14 points above cover many of them. Three which stand out are:

***Jesus’ life was predicted in advance***, and in considerable detail. This amazing fact authenticated His identity and claims. This has happened to no other person, ever.

***Jesus claimed to be God***. No other religious founder ever made such a claim. Most were not even trying to start a “new religion.” Hinduism did not even have a founder, but evolved from local practices and foreign invaders. Some say that Hinduism is not even a religion and impossible to define because it stands for everything and thus for nothing. Japan’s Shintoism, which saw the Emperor Hirohito as God, was discredited when Japan lost World War II, causing Hirohito to disavow his deity. Islam’s Mohammed did not claim to be God.

***Jesus claimed to be “the Way.”*** The others generally tried to describe what they thought was *a way*. Lao Tzu (Taoism) recognized an ultimate truth but admitted he could not define it (but strangely referred to it as a “Son”). K’ung Fu-tzu (Confucious) never really intended to start a religion but only to outline an ethical system.

Buddhism is primarily an ethical system. Its founder, Siddhartha Gautama, like the others, never claimed to be divine or even to have divine revelation. But overzealous followers later deified him. Jesus summarized all valid ethics in just one word—love, a concept He was sent to personify. He also said, “*No one comes to the Father except through me.*”<sup>17</sup>

*Jesus was resurrected, leaving an empty grave.* The others, like all humans, died and remained dead. Even though Buddhism’s founder, Gautama, died about four centuries before Jesus was born, parts of his body, such as hair and teeth, are still preserved and enshrined.

### **His power**

In a most incredible statement, after His resurrection and just before His ascension to heaven, Jesus Christ said:

*All authority (power) in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*<sup>17A</sup>

Note the word *all*. He did not say some authority, or most authority. He said *all* authority. The Greek word for authority here is *exousia*, which is also translated *power*.

In other words, there is no authority or power in the entire universe that the Father has not given over to His only begotten Son! The Son, the second Person of the Godhead, has it all.

The Father did not give some of it to Buddha, some to Mohammed, some to a few Hindu gurus, or maybe a little to other religious founders. He did not give it to government leaders. He did not give it to professors or academic leaders. He did not give it to Hollywood stars. He did not give it to network news anchors. All these people have a degree of human influence, but that is nothing compared with the power we are talking about.

The Father gave it all to His Son. It is the same power that created the universe and the same power that holds it together. As previously quoted, in Colossians 1:16-17, the apostle Paul wrote:

*For by him (Christ) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether*

*thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

While really incomprehensible, try to grasp something of this absolute creative and sustaining power of Christ:

- \* In one second, our sun emits more energy than man has done since he was created.

- \* Our sun is only an average-size star. One star, the Pistol Star, produces 1 million times the energy of the sun and has 100 times its mass.

- \* Our sun and entire solar system are just a pinpoint, or small speck, in our Milky Way galaxy.

- \* Our entire Milky Way galaxy is just a pinpoint, or small speck, in the universe.

- \* There are perhaps 200 billion stars just in our galaxy.

- \* If our galaxy was the size of the North American continent, our entire solar system would only be the size of a tea cup.

- \* While estimates continue to rise, our galaxy is just one of more than 100 billion galaxies in the universe, many of which are comprised of 200 billion or more stars.

- \* Quasars, at the extreme edge of the known universe, some 1,000 times brighter than our Milky Way galaxy, emit as much energy every second as our sun does in 10 million years.

- \* Astronomers say that the total number of stars in space could equal or surpass the total number of grains of sand on all the seashores of the world, and in most cases they are separated by trillions of miles.

(Some of the above information has only recently become known because of the orbiting Hubble telescope.)

Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, “*My own hands stretched out the heavens*” (Isaiah 45:12).

### Historical impact

If God took on human form and visited the earth, one might conclude that such a visit would have a major impact on history.

In fact, Jesus came and punctuated human history, dividing it between B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (anno Domini—"in the year of our Lord").

Even modern anti-Christian attempts to change B.C. and A.D. to B.C.E. (before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) would still peg the calendar to the Person and life of Jesus Christ! Therefore, every letter, newspaper, magazine and, in fact, nearly every document honors Him by showing the years since He was on the earth.

History is *His-story*. Have you ever wondered if human history has any purpose, if there is any rhyme or reason to the rise and fall of nations and empires or for the vicissitudes of human activity, often depressing in horror? Atheistic materialism would tell us that we're here as a result of cosmic accident, that we evolved from the chance collision of sea slime molecules, and that we're going nowhere. Even if humanity progresses, someday it will all be wiped out when the sun burns out and the solar system becomes extinct. Ultimately, according to this view, life is a giant mistake, and all that we hold dear is a cruel joke.

But the Bible tells us that God does indeed have a *plan* for history:

*For God has allowed us to know the secret of his plan, and it is this: he purposes in his sovereign will that all human history be consummated in Christ, that everything that exists in Heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in him.*<sup>18</sup>

The influence of Christ on our own civilization has been foundational and pervasive. The famous British historian, Arnold Toynbee, described Christianity as the "chrysalis" from which the entire Western civilization emerged.<sup>19</sup>

Although he was not the first human in the New World, Christopher Columbus started the chain of events in the 1400s that led to our present society. His first name actually means "Christ-

bearer,” and his last name “dove,” the symbol of the Holy Spirit. Columbus was a devout believer in Christ, and he was convinced that God had given him a divine mission: to carry the light of Christ to undiscovered lands.<sup>20</sup> At his first stop upon reaching the New World, Columbus gave it a very special name: San Salvador, meaning “Holy Savior.” He planted a cross everywhere he landed and dedicated the place to God.

Later, the first permanent English-speaking settlement in the New World at Jamestown in 1607 had as its “principal and main ends... to preach... and the propagation of the gospel...”<sup>21</sup> A few years afterward, in 1620, the settlers at Plymouth expressed a similar motivation. Before the Plymouth settlers even came ashore in 1620, they made a covenant with themselves and God called the Mayflower Compact. This document began: “In the name of God... Having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith... in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves into a civil body politic.” All these early settlers on the east coast of the new world were motivated by one overriding factor—their Christian faith.

A biblical world view undergirds the framing documents of our nation. Recent research has shown that all but a very few of the men who wrote the United States Constitution were orthodox in their Christian faith and not deists as some cynically claim. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, while not known as orthodox Christians, are claimed by some to have been deists. However, we know they had biblically influenced views of life and human nature and made statements incompatible with deism. Deism recognizes a God but sees Him as an absentee landlord who never interferes with the world or humanity, meaning the Bible cannot be inspired, prayer is futile, and Jesus cannot be divine.

Historian C. Gregg Singer states that at the Constitutional Convention, “It is conceded that a more Christian philosophy permeated the thinking and actions of the members.”<sup>22</sup>

The Founders derived much of their thought from authors such as John Locke and William Blackstone who got most of their ideas from the Bible.

Even the concepts of private property and free enterprise have biblical roots. Both the Jamestown and Plymouth settlements initially attempted a collectivism (communism) type of economic arrangement but it proved disastrously inefficient and of short duration. For example, at Plymouth, a new Governor Bradford wisely switched to private farming. Production dramatically increased and famine ceased. Bradford criticized the former leadership for denying private property and the attempt at a communistic economy, chiding, “as if they were wiser than God.”<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps John Quincy Adams said it best:

The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government and the principles of Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

**Separation of church and state?** One may wonder about the following constitutional provision:

The church... shall be separated from the state and the school from the church.

However, most are surprised to learn that the phrase is from Article 53 of the Constitution of the former atheistic Soviet Union! The U. S. Constitution says nothing like that and only prohibits any law respecting the establishment of religion, or *prohibiting the free exercise thereof*. It shocks many to learn that it does not mention separation of church and state, a phrase invented by anti-Christian elements from a letter by Thomas Jefferson, taken out of context. This basically means that government cannot establish or interfere with religion. It does not prevent religious conviction from affecting the process of government. For example, most criminal laws (murder, rape, theft, etc.) reflect the standards of Judeo-Christian heritage. Laws always have their roots in the mores of a culture, and mores spring from a people’s view of life and reality. The false mantra, “you cannot legislate morality” is proven wrong by the historic legislative process itself and the laws of all nations. Laws reflect the moral standards of a nation’s people.



The influence of Christ also pervaded the nation's early institutions. For example, history has largely ignored the fact that fully 104 of the first 119 colleges founded in the United States were Christian and dedicated to the idea that God is the basis of all knowledge. Harvard had in its laws that each student should consider: "The main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ... and therefore to lay Christ... as the only foundation for all sound learning and knowledge." Yale, Columbia, and Princeton had similar roots.

In spite of the shortcomings of our nation and our people, and there are many, people all over the world recognize that the concept and the dynamic of the free human spirit and the historic values represented in America, which sprang from its Christian roots, are the only things preventing the entire world from being swallowed into the dark spiritual abyss of atheistic, materialistic, totalitarian communism, or some other form of tyranny. Sadly and alarmingly, there are those even in our own nation who are bent on destroying these roots and who would lead us toward cultural suicide. It makes the words of Dr. Jedediah Morse in 1799, close to 200 years ago, both relevant and prophetic:

To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoys. In proportion as the genuine effects of Christianity are diminished in any nation, either through unbelief, or the corruption of its doctrines, or the neglect of its institutions; in the same proportion will the people of that nation recede from the blessings of genuine freedom.... Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.<sup>24</sup>

Morse's observation is not a pious platitude but is based on a psychological fact. Commitment to Christ and His rule in one's personal life brings self-restraint in human relationships. A person

must be ruled from within or from without, either through restraining self or being restrained. Lack of self-restraint always results in either anarchy or repression. In 1852, statesman and congressman Robert C. Winthrop made an interesting comment on this principle:

All societies must be governed in some way or other. The less they may have of stringent state government, the more they must have of individual self-government. The less they rely on public law or physical force, the more they must rely on private moral restraint.

Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled, either by a power within them, or by a power without them; either by the Word of God, or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible, or by the bayonet.<sup>25</sup>

### **Who's gonna meet you?**

The exclusive claims by Jesus Christ are a stumbling block to some and considered "intolerant" in today's society of tolerance for every perverse behavior and belief except Christianity. But a dynamic and popular black preacher put it this way in his typical plain and folksy language:

What you gonna do when you die? Some people think you are just going to be in nothingness, it's just going to be the end. Oh, have you been deceived! How can you take the advice of somebody who's never died? I am taking the advice of somebody who died but got up on the third day! I'd rather take the advice of somebody who has been there, done that! I got a Jesus who died, and got up to tell me all about it! And then He said, "Death and hell have been defeated." So I am going to take His word.

But when you die, to be absent from the body, and you did not get born again, that means when you die and your spirit and soul comes out of your body, you now have to look around to see who's gonna meet

you. Will angels meet you to escort you to the gate of heaven, or will demons meet you to escort you to the gate of hell? You can't say you believe in heaven and not believe in hell. There is a hell. There are demons. There is a Satan. There is a place called hell. There is a God. There are angels. There is a heaven....

What you gonna do, man? It's gonna happen. And you get a chance to live 40, 50, 70, 80 years—to make one decision! People don't go to hell because they do bad things. People go to hell because they reject Jesus....

(Some may say...) "Well, what are you trying to say, that your religion is the only one that's right?" YES! I've been trying to say that for 25 years! YES! There is nothing that can compare to what Jesus has done on the cross. Nothing.

(Some may say...) "Why don't you get all the religions together to show unity?" I don't want to be unified with something that denies Jesus. Have a meeting by yourself!<sup>26</sup>

Jesus Christ is the most remarkable Person who has ever lived. He not only claimed to be God and "the only way" to heaven, but the global effects of His "one solitary life" are pervasive. They touch in one way or another all the earth's billions of inhabitants.

Rather than further examining the effect of Jesus upon temporal nations and institutions, it is more important to discover His effect upon individual people, each of whom is a priceless and eternal entity. For these individuals, the life of Jesus unlocked and explained another mystery, or secret, which had been hidden since the world was created.

"What you gonna do, man? It's gonna happen." Check out this secret in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

# The Mysterious Secret

This chapter might be called “The Mystery of History.” The Bible says this mystery “*was kept secret since the world began.*”<sup>1</sup>

The person who wrote the most about this mystery and, in fact, who wrote most of the New Testament, was a man named Paul.

He was of the tribe of Benjamin, and a Pharisee—a “Hebrew of Hebrews” he called himself—the consummate Jew. He was a scholar, having received strict schooling on Jewish law and tradition from Gamaliel, one of the great Judaic teachers of the day.

This is an important point: Paul (formerly called Saul) was intimately aware of the revelations of the Jewish Scriptures, or Jewish Bible—what Christians call the Old Testament today. No one was going to fool him or involve him with any kind of new religion or sect. In fact, he was so zealous for and protective of traditional Judaism that he became one of the leading persecutors of those who believed that another Jew, Yeshua (Jesus), had fulfilled the ancient Hebrew prophecies of the coming Messiah and had risen from the dead. The number of these Jewish believers had risen into many thousands and was growing daily. Paul furiously opposed them, and even assented to their deaths.

### **A supernatural encounter**

But one day while on his way to Damascus to take some of these believers captive, he had a dramatic, supernatural encounter with this resurrected and ascended Jesus. In a blinding light and with a voice from heaven, the resurrected Christ revealed Himself to Paul. It was so real that Paul's life was instantly and totally changed, and so should our own lives as we read and consider the account. He now knew experientially that Jesus was indeed alive. In an instant reversal of his whole life's direction, Paul called Him "Lord" and purposed to obey His instructions. This was probably the most dramatic and instant change of any person in history. Read about this entire amazing event in the book of Acts, chapter 9.

Scholar that he was, Paul then studied the ancient Scriptures intensely and saw that Yeshua (Jesus) had, in fact, fulfilled the messianic prophecies. With his training in Judaism coupled to his actual encounter with the risen Messiah plus later study, this Jew, Paul, probably had a deeper comprehension of the spiritual truth that embraced both centuries-old Judaism and the new messianic faith (later called Christianity) than any person who has ever lived. It is no accident that Paul was chosen by Jesus to take His message to the Roman Empire and the Gentile world, and to write most of the New Testament. This message soon permeated the Empire and largely laid the foundation for future civilization and institutions as we know them. Paul had discovered the solution to "the mystery of history."

### **A secret mystery**

Years after his life-changing experience and later study, Paul wrote about *"the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith."*<sup>1</sup>

Another Jew and one of the original disciples, Peter, told us that the ancient Hebrew prophets searched and inquired about this mystery but didn't understand it, and that even angels longed to see it but apparently could not.<sup>2</sup>

You are about to see what angels had not been able to see, and what the Hebrew prophets wrote about but really didn't understand!

For example, about 700 B.C., the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, wrote about a great Person who was to be born at some future time. Here are some of the things he said, two quotes a repeat from Chapter 2:

*The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bare a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (which means "God with us").<sup>3</sup>*

*Unto us a son is given... and his name shall be called... The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.<sup>4</sup>*

*He is despised and rejected of men... he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities... he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter... thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.<sup>5</sup>*

Isaiah detailed these facts *seven centuries before Christ was born*, even revealing that He would suffer and die for us! No doubt, Isaiah really did not understand what he was writing, but was simply recording words as God gave them.

(Clarification: there is a weak argument that the Hebrew word, *almah*, for "virgin" above doesn't necessarily mean virgin. It can mean just a "maiden"; however, the context here proves its translation as "virgin"—that it was a God-given "sign." A normal birth obviously would not be a sign. Also, the New Testament Greek accounts confirm the meaning. Further, a God/human conception was necessary for the incarnation and God's plan of redemption, a concept made understandable by Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this book.)

Scholars refer to a "messianic thread" running throughout the entire Old Testament that refers to a coming Savior and Deliverer. Bible-believing Jews still look for Him and know that He will come some day. But even though Jesus was a Jew, the Jewish prophecies spoke of Him, all His disciples were Jews, most of His early followers were Jews, and by the end of the first century an estimated one million Jews in the world (in a relatively small world population of only about 300 million) believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, many still do not believe.

With all the prophetic confirmations, their disbelief has always been a curiosity. But a study of the Hebrew prophets shows many references to *two* appearances of the Messiah on the earth: the first appearance, as Isaiah mentioned above, was to be in humility—in a human frame, of a human mother, as a servant, to suffer for “our transgressions”; the second and later appearance is to be in power and majesty, to usher in a new era of history.

Jesus was the only person in history ever pre-announced. Even the Gentile world was looking for the coming Messiah. Tacitus records that in Rome people were persuaded that the “Master” of the world was coming from Judea. Suetonius reiterated that idea. The Greeks also expected Him; Aeschylus spoke of God appearing on earth “to accept upon His head the pangs of thy own sins vicarious.” The Fourth Eclogue of Virgil spoke of “a chaste woman, smiling on her infant boy, with whom the iron age would pass away.” There is other evidence, even in Chinese history.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, the Holy Spirit spoke in a gentle voice throughout the world, to those who had ears and hearts to hear, that a Savior was coming.

When Jesus was on the earth and in the decades following, many, many Jews recognized His identity. But others—those with a political agenda—wanted a Messiah to deliver the nation from Roman rule and to bring them personal power. And the religious leaders whom Jesus rebuked and called “hypocrites” wanted no part of Him. Jesus spoke of the *spirit* of the law of God, love and servitude, whereas they enjoyed the authority and prestige of enforcing the *letter* of the law on others. Their hearts blinded them from understanding that Messiah’s first appearance on earth was to establish a spiritual kingdom, not a political one, which would come later.

Many Jews today believe that Yeshua was the prophesied Messiah but, of course, many do not. This is a great spiritual mystery and is discussed by Paul in the eleventh chapter of the book of Romans. A contributing factor today is surely the evil persecution that has been inflicted upon the Jewish people by misguided Gentiles falsely in the name of Christianity, a tragedy of history. But oddly,

Judaism to a great many Jews is only a cultural and ethnic identification rather than a religion based on faith and practice, with even their own Scriptures or history not seen as divinely influenced. In fairness, however, many people also name Christianity as their affiliation with no apparent faith, commitment, or attempt to follow and obey Christ.

But the prophecies were very specific and unmistakable—a virgin mother, a son called “God with us” and “Prince of Peace,” a *lamb* who was slaughtered, born in Bethlehem, and scores of others. The prophet Daniel even predicted the timing of His coming!

One person in history, and only one, has come on the scene and met *all* the criteria.

When Jesus first made his public appearance, the Hebrew prophet, John, saw Him and said, “*Look, the Lamb of God!*”<sup>7</sup> John knew from the prophecies that Messiah was coming, and coming as a sacrificial “lamb.” He recognized Jesus when they encountered at the Jordan River. John confirms the title “lamb” at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry before there was any hint of the possibility of His later execution. John obviously understood the prophecies.

During his three years of public ministry, Jesus unlocked many spiritual mysteries. He clarified the divine law, talked about love, and gave guidelines on how to receive eternal life with God. And finally, just as Isaiah had prophesied, He “*was led like a lamb to the slaughter,*” and was executed as a common criminal, suffering the most excruciating execution ever devised by man—a Roman crucifixion.

Can you imagine the enormity of this event—God allowing Himself to be executed as a common criminal? It boggles the mind, but it also demonstrates both the ultimate depravity of humanity (which killed the human body of God Almighty!) as well as God’s immeasurable love for us.



### The mystery

So, what is the great mystery?

There are two parts in the way the mystery can be described.

**Part 1.** Strangely, almost 2,000 years after the fact, it is hard to view a sporting event on television without seeing reference to the mystery. I have seen it during just about every Super Bowl. Recently, with hundreds of millions, maybe billions, of other viewers all over the world, I was watching a game and saw it! Behind the announcer on the field, someone purposely stepped in front of the camera's view and held up a sign for the entire national and international TV audience to see. God has innovative ways of getting His message out. The sign read simply:

#### **“JOHN 3:16”**

There are many ways in which the mystery could be described, but probably no way of stating it is more clear, more profound, more simple and to the point, and more universally known than John 3:16—the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of the Gospel of John in the New Testament:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

These are the words of Jesus, Himself, recorded by another John, the disciple. Just 26 words. You can read them out loud comfortably in just *eight seconds*.

In less than one minute, just a few seconds, you can absorb them into your spirit. They become a part of your being.

Read it again. Look at the key words: God.... loved.... world.... gave.... Son.... believes.... life.

When it says that *God so loved the world*, that means He so loved you! If you were the only person on the earth, He would have gone to the cross just for you.

**Part 2.** You will be amazed at the second part of this mystery, an astonishing, special, and little-understood truth which will be explained in Chapter 8. Even many lifelong Christians do not understand it.

You can easily understand the idea of *God*. You can also easily understand that God can *love*. I'll assume you can grasp that. But what I want to explain now is the aspect where, in order to express this love, God *gave* His *Son*. And I will explain the rationale of how "believing" this can give you "eternal life."

Now it's explanation time. Why and how does it work? The mystery and explanation lie in "the mysterious substance," the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

# The Mysterious Substance

In all the world, there is only one substance that truly represents life.

Paradoxically, this same substance is also thought of as representing death.

This substance is truly a mystery.

Actually, the substance itself contains and sustains life, and the absence or loss of it is usually associated with death. It is not only mysterious, but it is a miraculous substance.

Strangely, however, in spite of its marvelous and miraculous nature and unlike any other substance, just the sight of it is gruesome and often makes people sick! Some even faint. Just seeing it traumatizes some people. And even though the substance gives life, when life ends this same substance can create a frightful and messy scene. It can cause a sickening sight.

Also, strangely, scientific statements were made about this substance in the writings of the Bible thousands of years before science as we know it even existed. From Genesis, the first book, to Revelation, the last, the wonderful substance is mentioned in what some call a “scarlet thread” that runs throughout the entire Bible.

The substance is liquid. The substance is red. The substance is...

**BLOOD!**

Some say that Christianity is a “bloody” religion because of its emphasis on Jesus’ blood, a mystery which will be explained in this chapter. Graphic, gory depictions of this blood were dramatically portrayed in Mel Gibson’s popular 2004 movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, the realism of which left worldwide audiences gripped with a better understanding of the excruciating torture and pain Jesus experienced for our sakes.

Actually Judaism, which gave birth to Christianity, is even bloodier. Today blood sacrifices are no longer offered, but for centuries animal sacrifice was a common practice in Judaism. The Jewish-Roman historian, Josephus, records that there were 255,600 animals slaughtered in Jerusalem at one Jewish Passover observance in the first century.<sup>1</sup> Blood from the altar actually ran in the streets.

There is a critically important reason why blood is foundational to both Judaism and Christianity—the *symbolism seen in the former foreshadowed the reality to come in the latter!* The latter finally gave needed meaning to the former; without the meaning, the rituals would have been nonsensical and are probably considered such by those who do not understand.

The Passover was an annual event. If approximately that many lambs were slain each year, think how many died over the centuries from this practice. Yet, *each little lamb was symbolic and prophetic of a human Lamb*, the coming Messiah, about whom the prophet Isaiah had said, “*He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.*”

Just think, for centuries the Israelites were obedient to God in their blood sacrifice rituals, not having any idea of their symbolism or their real and ultimate purpose—a lesson for us to be obedient even though we may not understand everything. But blood sacrifice didn’t start with the Israelites but is traced to the beginning of human history.

The reverence for blood seems universal throughout all cultures. Anthropologists find widespread practices of blood sacrifice to idols from earliest human history and even through today, and also the use of blood as a means of ratifying an agreement, or “covenant,” between people.<sup>2</sup> There is an innate human awareness, put there by

God Himself, of the solemn importance and spiritual ramifications of blood. But only hints of truth, combined with superstition and paganism, produce perversions of belief and practice as exist in some of the world today. Without full revelation, the peoples of the world have seen only shadows of spiritual truth. And with the spiritual significance of blood, as with other spiritual truths, God used the Hebrew people to most clearly communicate and implement His plan and purpose.

*They (the Jews) have been entrusted with the very words of God.*<sup>3</sup>

### **Life is in the blood**

Medical science now knows that it is blood which transports oxygen and other nutrients throughout the entire body via an ingenious 60,000 mile circulatory network. Vessels ranging from major arteries down to capillaries measuring one-tenth the diameter of a human hair carry life-giving blood to each of the approximately one hundred trillion cells in our bodies. The food is carried along in this stream of liquid by blood cells, like containers sloshing through a gigantic pipeline. There may be five million or more red blood cells in just one drop of blood. Upon this continuous, moment by moment, supply of food, our entire body depends for life itself. For example, our brain will remain alive only for about five minutes without it. The blood carries life to our whole body. What is amazing, however, is that some 3,500 years ago and before modern medical knowledge, the Lord said to Moses:

*The life of the flesh is in the blood.*<sup>4</sup>

The scientific accuracy of the statement at that time in history confirms its divine origin. Moses had no way of knowing of its truth.

But blood sustains life in another amazing way besides transporting food and oxygen. After the blood delivers its cargo, it picks up waste material to transport on the return trip! It not only nourishes but cleanses every cell in the human body, removing toxic material that, if not removed, would otherwise quickly accumulate and kill us. The blood literally *washes* each cell, then carries the waste material away for filtering and disposal. Again, it is equally

amazing that almost 2,000 years ago the apostle John wrote that the Messiah

*washed us from our sins in his own blood.*<sup>5</sup>

In those days blood was logically looked upon as something that soiled and stained. Other than from divine inspiration, there was no rational basis for attributing such a “cleansing” function to blood. John also wrote:

*The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*<sup>6</sup>

This gives a totally new perspective to sin and its consequence. Bodily poisons and waste bring physical death unless continually “washed” away by the blood. Similarly, sin can bring spiritual death unless continually “washed” away by the blood of Jesus. And like human blood in our human bodies, in a mystical sense the blood of Jesus is continually washing and cleansing His spiritual body.

In another fascinating anatomical comparison, believers in Christ are referred to in the Bible as the “body” of Christ, with Christ the head and everyone else as members. The blood of Christ is continually supplying *life* to His body, and simultaneously *cleansing* from impurities—the very functions of actual blood! And all this was written almost 2,000 years ago before science really knew anything about bodily functions!

World-renowned surgeon Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey skillfully describe the medical marvels of the human body and its metaphorical counterpart, the spiritual body, in their book, *In His Image*.<sup>7</sup> I highly recommend this fascinating volume.

### **The eternal blood covenant**

The basic functions of Messiah’s blood are not an isolated concept in the Old and New Testaments but are a constant theme, a theme which, in fact, is too little known, understood, or appreciated. This chapter will describe this deeply mystical yet practical truth—the *eternal blood covenant*. It is probably the most profound truth in the universe and in all of the history of the human race.

A “covenant” is a *binding* pledge, promise, or agreement between two parties (the words “covenant” and “testament” are synonyms;

the two parts of the Bible are sometimes called the Old Covenant and the New Covenant).

“Cutting a covenant” was an ancient practice, not just with the Hebrews but also in other nations and cultures. It involved the cutting of flesh (animal or human) and the shedding of blood to seal this binding agreement. A blood covenant was the most sacred and solemn of contracts, even bringing an inter-union of the two parties (see Chapter 8 for elaboration of the inter-union concept). It was a completely unbreakable pledge, not revocable for any reason, which in itself has profound theological implications.

Foreshadowing the eternal blood covenant to come, God made a covenant with Abraham:

*I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.*<sup>8</sup>

Abraham’s part of the covenant was to institute the rite of circumcision, as “*a sign of the covenant.*”<sup>9</sup> Circumcision, of course, “cuts” flesh and sheds blood, a bloodletting/covenant act which foreshadowed the time when God would also shed His own blood in a covenant act. But why on such an odd and humbling part of the male anatomy? Another mystery. But God is never arbitrary. Perhaps it is because in God’s perspective it represents the human instrument for the inter-union of beings and impartation of human seed, from which comes new life, all symbolic.

The story of Abraham contains further symbolism that relates to the New Testament, such as belief in a *miraculous birth* (Isaac), offering his *only son* (by Sarah) as a sacrifice, and belief that his son would be *resurrected*— all pointing to the miraculous birth, death, and resurrection of God’s own Son. (See Genesis chapters 21 and 22, and Hebrews 11:19.)

Through the Hebrew prophets God spoke of a “new covenant” to come in the future. It would be for all the people of the world, not just the Hebrew people. The Messiah would be the mediator of this new covenant, and it would be *ratified in His own blood*.<sup>10</sup>

### **The last Passover Lamb**

At the famous “last supper” before His crucifixion, Jesus was at the table with His disciples. It is deeply significant that they were eating the traditional Passover meal. Because of the rapid Hellenization (influence of Greek culture) of Christianity in the first century as it spread throughout the Gentile world, many forget its totally Jewish origin.

Jesus was a strict Hebrew, always observant of the law. The Passover meal itself is rich in tradition and symbolism, its origin tracing to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt some 1,500 years earlier. God had told those early Israelites to take the blood of an *unblemished male lamb* and put it on their doorposts, then eat the lamb. The blood, He said, would protect them from the death plague being experienced by the Egyptians. God said He would “pass over” them when He saw the blood, thus the term *Passover*. (See Exodus chapter 12.) And as we shall see, “eating” the lamb had great prophetic significance.

It is ironic but providential that the true Passover Lamb was Himself eating the traditional Passover meal just hours before His own blood would be shed, finally fulfilling centuries of prophecy and symbolism. In fact, the miraculous chronology of events during this time is fascinating. The slaying of Jesus, the true Lamb, coincided with the sacrifice of the other symbolic lambs during this Passover! This in itself is absolutely amazing timing and evidence of the divine plan and prophetic fulfillment.

There is also scientific reality in the Passover. Blood from an “unblemished” male lamb was necessary, symbolic of the Lamb of God who was without sin (unblemished), unlike any other human who ever lived. The blood had to be perfect. Normal human blood can be quite imperfect and can carry impurities, even death-causing viruses so prevalent in the world today. Only the Lamb’s blood was pure, perfect, and undefiled. *Only perfect blood can perfectly cleanse*. Only the Lamb’s blood can perfectly cleanse us from our sins.

During this Passover meal before His death, Jesus took some



bread, blessed it, broke it, then gave it to His friends, saying:

*Take and eat; this is my body.*<sup>11</sup>

**The mystery of the aphikomen.** Jesus' words and actions here shocked the disciples, according to Jewish authors Ceil and Moishe Rosen, because the meal, including the lamb, had already been consumed.<sup>12</sup> According to tradition, nothing else was to be eaten.

Jesus instituted a new memorial, an after dish, later called "aphikomen" (or afikomen). He demonstrated that the Paschal (Passover) lamb no longer had significance because the true Lamb had come. Also, Jesus apparently saw into the future when there would be no more altar (destroyed shortly thereafter by the Romans in A. D. 70) or sacrifice. He used the aphikomen for the first time to represent the Passover lamb and *His own body*, formerly represented by the body of the animal.

The Jews have always used *unleavened* (matzo) bread for the Passover ceremony. Leaven is symbolic of sin. They use *three* matzo wafers. The *middle* one, the "aphikomen," is *broken* during the meal, *hidden*, and *later returned*. This is an early but mysterious tradition. No one really knows its meaning. The three wafers represent *unity*, but Jewish scholars do not agree on what the unity represents. Some Jews believe the three wafers represent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but Isaac's body (the *middle* wafer) was never actually broken! Could it be that the unity of the *three* wafers represents the unity of the one but triune God (Father, *Son*, and Holy Spirit), and the *unleavened*, of course, His purity. Is the middle wafer, the aphikomen, the Son whose body was indeed *broken*, who is mysteriously *hidden* from the Jewish people, and who will *return* as their Messiah as He promised? I believe it is. Such an interpretation clearly makes sense, especially in view of Jesus' own introduction of the after dish to represent His own body, plus all other Passover symbolism.

Interestingly, aphikomen comes from a Greek word that is sometimes translated "the coming one," or "that which comes last."

In every Passover meal, then, the Jews albeit unknowingly

celebrate the sinless Messiah whose body was broken, who temporarily is hidden from them, and who will return.

They finish eating the broken aphikomen in the Sephardic or Eastern tradition with the words, “In memory of the Passover sacrifice.” This has to be one of the most profound ceremonies in human history where, ironically, the participants do not understand the full meaning of their actions!

After Jesus broke the bread and told them to eat it, He then took a cup of wine (fruit of the vine), gave thanks, and passed it to his friends, saying:

*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*<sup>13</sup>

*This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*<sup>14</sup>

They were actually invited to “consume” Jesus’ body and blood. This is not surprising, for as we pointed out above, the Passover lamb had been “eaten” from the beginning (later, with no lamb, the aphikomen instead).

Previously Jesus said something puzzling to the people:

*I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*<sup>15</sup>

He was obviously not talking about cannibalism, but about a spiritual phenomenon. But what does it mean, and how does it work?

Well, the early church replaced the prophetic Passover meal of Judaism, which was fulfilled in the Messiah, with a sacrament called “Communion,” or “the Lord’s Supper.” Believers gathered and partook of bread (His body) and wine or grape juice (His blood) “in remembrance” of Him. The church continues that tradition today. Beliefs vary on the extent of symbolism vs. reality involved in this sacrament. However one believes, it is important to participate and to remember the *cleansing and life-giving effects of the Lamb’s body and blood*.

The reality of the new covenant, the eternal blood covenant, is that in the Messiah God chose to inhabit a human body, and let that body become as a sacrificial lamb, taking upon Himself the sins of the entire human population of the planet from the beginning to the end of human history. All of history and every human who ever lived or ever will live were represented on the cross with Jesus: the most profound event—ever.

Dr. Roy Blizzard, a recognized American expert in Hebrew studies and archaeology, once voiced a simple summary of this historical event for which no adjectives are adequate to describe:

In the veins of Jesus flowed God's own blood.

It is a mind-boggling thought that the Creator God would choose to experience this humble and painful human condition. But He purposed to do so as an *ultimate act of love*.

The divine blood in Jesus' body was a result of the virgin birth, essential for the fertilized egg and resulting chromosome/gene combinations to have a divine component. Rather than myth, the virgin birth was biologically mandatory for the entire purpose of His plan of redemption, the incarnation and later crucifixion. It was a product of God's wisdom and power, and an integral and indispensable part of His plan.

### **The amazing blood covering**

All of previous Hebrew history was but a preparation and a portrait of this divine love-plan. It didn't just start with Abraham, but can be traced all the way to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned, they used fig leaves to "cover" their shame. But God determined the mere vegetable product to be unsuitable and replaced the leaves with the skin of an animal, the first symbolic act of "blood-covering."

In this initial instance of sin, blood had to be shed to "cover" it. Surely God loved the little animal and was saddened to see its death. But He chose flesh as an atonement to demonstrate the seriousness of human sin. Sin brings human death (physical) and spiritual death (separation from God). Bloodshed typifies the utter seriousness of sin, because a loss of life is necessary.

It is tragic how sin is taken so lightly and excused in our society today. A day of reckoning is coming, but already society is suffering from rampant violence and widespread immorality.

But on the positive side, there is a more important reason for the blood covering. It is a medical fact that blood's most important function is to bring *life*. It is mainly a life-giving substance rather than just a symbol of death. Therefore, in addition to demonstrating the seriousness of sin, a blood sacrifice restores life to the guilty one. It covers us. It clothes us. The Bible says:

*The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*<sup>16</sup>

An often overlooked truth in man's fall is that Adam and Eve by *their own efforts* had attempted to "cover" (or justify) themselves by using fig leaves. This was humanistic reasoning causing humanistic effort to cover human failings, a condition so prevalent in the world ever since, and especially today. But it is not God's way.

In a message also applicable to us, God said to Adam and Eve, in effect, "Your failings may be overlooked, but only *My way*. None of your self-effort can accomplish anything. You can't do anything, but I can. I will cover your sins *Myself*, and with blood. It is something I will do *Myself*. In fact, I will ultimately shed *My own blood* for your covering. I will do that for you, because I love you."

He did. That is *the blood of the eternal covenant*.<sup>17</sup> This covenant is humanity's only hope of forgiveness and eternal life with God. It is His only provision. He has made no other way.

### **The "lost" ark of the covenant**

The subject of the popular movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," was the famous ark of the covenant that the Israelites used according to God's instructions. The ark provided further prophetic symbolism of the eternal blood covenant to come. It was a box that contained the original tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was kept in the Holy of Holies behind a curtain in the Holy Place both of the tabernacle and the later temple. This is the place where God manifested a special presence—the most holy of places, ever (until God later chose a

different type of temple in which to reveal Himself as described in Chapter 8).

The top of the box was called the Mercy Seat (Hebrew word for “cover”). The sins of the people were covered, or forgiven, once a year when the high priest would sprinkle the blood of sacrificed animals on the Mercy Seat.<sup>18</sup> In effect, the Commandments within the ark were declaring the guilt of the people before the presence of God. But the blood on the Mercy Seat “covered” the accusations before they could even reach God!

The New Testament fulfillment of this symbolism was the Messiah, called the great high priest, whose own sacrifice is the “covering” for sins. The Commandments still declare our guilt, as no one can keep them perfectly by letter or spirit. But the blood of the eternal covenant “covers” the accusations. Such covering renders a “not guilty” verdict before God for those who have entered into the covenant, just like in the Old Testament practice.

What really happened to this “lost” ark, the subject of the aforementioned movie? It actually disappeared in history and hasn’t been seen since. See Chapter 10 for what may be an answer to this great mystery.

### **How to enter into the covenant**

How does one enter into the covenant?

We enter by *faith*—consuming this truth within ourselves. As we do so, we “eat” His flesh and “drink” His blood, consuming the Passover Lamb, just like the early Israelites consumed the slain lamb. The Lamb and His blood give us life and cleanse us from all of sin’s impurities. We enter into an irrevocable covenant with God Almighty who has promised eternal life: *“I will raise him up at the last day.”*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*<sup>19</sup>

God demonstrated this love by shedding His own blood, through which He made a covenant. We enter into this covenant by “believing” in Him and what He did.

The words *faith* and *believing* mean more than just intellectual agreement. Rather, they carry the idea of “relying on,” and “trusting in.” Basically, it means to entrust ourselves to God, an act of commitment. You cannot fully trust in a parachute until you jump out of an airplane and have to depend on it. You commit your life to its safety. It’s that way with God. You commit your life to His safety. We trust Him with the same abandonment—not reckless abandonment, because His safety is sure, but carefree abandonment. Because of Him, we can be free of care or worry.

We “covenant” with Him. It works two ways: He gave His life to us; we give our life to Him. And in a mystery to be discussed in Chapter 8, the blood covenant brings an inter-union of the two covenant makers.

It took God centuries of human history to orchestrate the events leading to the enactment of the blood covenant. But a person can enter into it in a moment, whether 10 years old or 110. Sudden insight into Truth—a spark of faith—an acceptance and commitment—and *shazam*—you will be changed forever! That’s just the way it works.

When we do, we are no longer captive to an existence constantly stalked by death. Everything in this world dies. All flesh decomposes, as does all vegetation. Even the sun has a limited life and is gradually dying. But we have found real and permanent life through that life-giving substance, blood—a special and very unusual blood:

*You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.<sup>20</sup>*

Interestingly, it was through Judaism and the Old Covenant that God instituted blood sacrifice as a means of removing sin and guilt. But when Christ, the Lamb of God, finally came, He became a final and lasting sacrifice for all time. Not coincidentally, in the first century, animal sacrifice ceased in Judaism. Although ostensibly for naturally explainable reasons, God obviously had a profound

spiritual reason—its prophetic purpose had been fulfilled.

This leaves a troubling problem for those who would reject Yeshua (Jesus) as the sacrificial Lamb. The first-century writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminded them that:

*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*<sup>21</sup>

Nowhere in the Jewish Scriptures did God change His mind and decide that blood was no longer required as a sin sacrifice. It always was, and still is, required. But the old symbolic way ceased. Now, for Jews and Gentiles, there is still a blood covering through the “blood of the new covenant.”

The Bible has been called “a love letter from God, written in blood, on an old rugged cross.”

God appeared in human form to sacrifice His own flesh one time, only one time, and for all time. He did it not just for the Jews who were the “chosen people” to communicate and implement His plan, but for all people, Jews and Gentiles, of all nations and all races, everywhere.

Even God’s personal name describes this incredible love-mission. It is really “the world’s most mysterious name.” This fascinating subject is discussed later in Chapter 7. But first, we will look at a very special message connected with this eternal blood covenant.

## Chapter 6

# The Mysterious Message

There is a wonderful, mysterious message called the “*message of reconciliation*.”

It is really one of those “bad news-good news” situations. Here is what it is all about.

You are a created being and obviously physical in nature. But you are keenly aware that there is something more than that—you know you also have a nonmaterial or “spirit” nature. You really don’t know where you came from, except from the inside of your mother. But that doesn’t really answer the question: “What’s this crazy life all about?”

You know that there is a God, but He is distant and unfamiliar. You sense a separation between God and yourself.

**The bad news.** There is, indeed, a separation, evidenced by the fact that you have to ask these questions. You wonder:

What is God like?

What does He think about me?

Can I know Him?

Will I ever see Him?

What happens to the real me after my body eventually dies, which is a certainty.



**The good news.** Well, there is one place in the whole world, and only one place, where there is an answer to these seemingly impossible questions—the Bible. And the answer is the “good news.” That’s actually the definition of the familiar word, *gospel*: a “good message” or “good news.”

Jesus’ instructions to His disciples before He ascended into heaven was for His followers to “*go into all the world and preach the good news.*” That’s why people who have heard it want to tell others about it.

It’s like finding a cure for cancer and being unable to keep it to yourself!

It’s not proselytizing in the sense of recruiting members; instead, it’s like shouting the news of rescue to fellow inhabitants on a lost space ship. And aren’t we?

Yes, there is a separation (the bad news), but there is also reconciliation (the good news). In fact, the apostle Paul says in the Bible:

*God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>*

The “mysterious message” is that *good news* message of reconciliation.

### **The reason for separation**

Why is there separation in the first place? And why is reconciliation necessary?

Well, it’s really simple when you stop to think about it. It’s totally logical. The late philosopher and theologian Derek Prince once described the Bible as “the most logical book in the world.”

Derek Prince was educated as a scholar of Greek and Latin at Eton College and Cambridge University, England, where he held a Fellowship in Ancient and Modern Philosophy at King’s College. He also studied the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, both at Cambridge University and at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In addition, he spoke a number of other modern languages. While

serving with the British army in World War II, he began to study the Bible and one day experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ (as some readers of this book may be experiencing right now). Out of this encounter he formed two conclusions: first, that Jesus Christ is alive; second, that the Bible is a true, relevant, logical, and up-to-date book. These conclusions altered the whole course of his life.

Here is one reason why the Scriptures are so logical:

The Bible reveals God as pure and holy—absolute perfection without even a single trace of any vice—a perfect Being. As the famous old hymn says:

Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,  
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see.  
Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.<sup>2</sup>

Humanity, on the other hand, is imperfect. All of us fall short of perfect love, and total purity of intent and actions. While few of us may be murderers, rapists, or thieves, nevertheless any rational person will admit that he or she is not perfect. Even the most saintly human knows his “bad side.” We all have it. Come on. Admit it. Some people, of course, choose a consistent and blatantly immoral “lifestyle” (a word currently popular in our modern society so the behavior won’t sound so bad; rarely used to mean a moral life).

Consequently, if God’s perfection represents 100 percent on the scale, all of us fall somewhere between 0 and 99. Actually, according to the Bible, we all score a big zero, our own purity in comparison with God’s.

**The problem:** God does not grade on the curve. In His eyes, only 100 percent is passing! God’s perfect nature demands no less than an absolute standard. Unfortunately, according to His standard of perfection, we all flunk.

That’s the bad news.

### **The unbridgeable chasm**

There is a great chasm separating God and humanity. Nothing man can do can bridge that chasm. However, in man's pride and ignorance he thinks he can cross the chasm separating himself from God. Many try good deeds, community service, philanthropy, even religion, trying to "justify" themselves before God and make Him their debtor. Some even attend or "join" churches without an understanding of what it is all about. Ask many Christians and Jews what they believe and why they believe it and they don't have a clue. These activities are not evil in themselves unless they are viewed as self-righteous efforts to "earn" God's favor. But "activities" or "joining" anything does not ameliorate the root problem, nor does it bridge the unbridgeable chasm to God.

Only the Bible explains humanity's propensity for evil, tracing this tendency all the way back to the very first humans. It has to do with the free exercise of our wills. Sometimes, even though we know better, we "will" to do wrong, to say or do something that may not honor God or may hurt someone else, violating God's principle attribute and the basic law of the universe—love. We just do it, like an incorrigible kid. Any such behavior is called "sin."

What person would deny that there is evil in the world? Who can look at history and witness man's inhumanity to man, and not admit the reality of evil. Consider Hitler and Nazism, Stalin and godless communism, tyrant Pol Pot and the genocide in Cambodia, and modern bloody terrorism, and on and on. Or consider the pandemic of sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, caused mostly by sexual immorality in violation of God's commandments.

The problem is not just among nations, but within cities, even between neighbors, and within families.

A person who with philosophic ease might deny the reality of evil would rapidly change his mind if a loved one was raped or killed, or if he had to experience Hitler's death camps, or a suicide terrorist killing his family in a shopping mall or in New York's Twin Towers.

Some who reject God's truths say that education is the answer to all this, a panacea brought about, of course, by more government

spending. Secular mentality often views government as god, a modern form of idolatry. However, some of the most evil deeds are done by some of the most educated people. For example, Hitler's Germany was one of the most "civilized" and educated nations in the history of the world, yet it became one of the most savage of all time. Such evil potential lurks within all people.

On a smaller scale, what about a harsh word to someone which causes hurt and maybe a permanent psychological scar?

What honest person would deny that there is occasionally evil in all of us, ranging from mildly selfish thoughts and deeds to deeds that can severely hurt others. There is evil in every person.

Actually, the totality of the evil of the self-centeredness of the average, apparently well-meaning person, any of us, would probably be shocking if we could see it with God's totally pure and loving eyes.

Admit it or not, we are all morally flawed—imperfect. Like oil and water, perfection and imperfection cannot mix. The two are distinct and separated.

Yet fellowship and reconciliation are God's heart desires. He originally created humans for the purpose of a mutual love relationship, and that is His ideal plan for eternity. You might say that His attribute of love actually caused the creation of humans. Why? Because love is not just a mushy feeling. *Love demands an object*; it is an active, not a passive concept. God's creation is the object of His love and a way in which He can express His love, putting it into action.

Some may ask, "Then why doesn't He just look over my imperfections and accept me the way I am?"

Well, in a sense that's exactly what He does, but He paid a big price. That's the good news!

Here's the catch. God cannot deny His own nature, and the universe must work on consistent principles. An important part of God's nature is revealed in the Bible as *justice*. Justice must always be served. This is an eternal and spiritual principle. There is *always* judgment, without exception. Nothing escapes God's awareness and justice. This means our wrongdoing, no matter the degree, small or

large, must be dealt with. It must receive recompense. The recompense, or reward, of wrongdoing is separation from God, the only source of good, joy, and true happiness in the universe. To be “cut off” from God is an unimaginable horror.

The scheme of eternity would be out of whack and unfair if evil was just ignored and not recompensed. Like the law of physics, an action requires a reaction. The action of man’s self-centeredness and propensity for evil has already, in fact, produced the reaction—*there already is separation*, and without a solution it will remain that way forever. In a real sense, humanity in general is already “cut off” from God. For proof, check your local newspaper and TV news, a daily documentation of a lost species.

### **God’s dilemma?**

“But how terrible,” you may say. “I don’t want to be punished for any wrong I have done. I don’t want to be ‘cut off’ from God. Where is His mercy?”

Is there a conflict between God’s attributes of love and mercy and His attribute of justice? This may seem true in our human way of thinking, but the seeming conflict in attributes is actually what produced the answer—His attributes of perfect *justice* and *wisdom*, combined with His attribute of perfect *love*.

In effect, God said, “There is only one way where both love and justice can be served, where My actions will be consistent and true as they must be. I will take their punishment on Myself. I will take on human form and suffer for them. I will visit the earth in human form and be their substitute. All they will have to do is to acknowledge who I am and what I have done for them. Then justice will be served. If they will just believe and follow Me, and accept what I will do for them, then I can declare them as righteous in My eyes, just as though they are perfect as I am. That is My covenant with them, and I will seal this covenant in My own blood.”

God then revealed this plan through His Hebrew prophets. For example, hundreds of years before Christ, Isaiah wrote about the perfect One to come in the future:

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent... by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities.<sup>3</sup>*

### **The chasm is bridged**

That last prophecy was fulfilled about 700 years later. Yeshua (Jesus) came and revealed that He was the fulfillment of the writings of Isaiah and all the other prophets. He summarized His mission when He said:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.<sup>4</sup>*

That is one brief, excellent way of describing “The Mysterious Message.”

Out of perfect and selfless love, God Himself bridged the chasm that man could not bridge.

Religion is sometimes defined as man trying to reach to God, trying to cross the impossible chasm. But in Christ, God reached down to man, doing for man what he could not do for himself.

**More bad news.** Fellowship with God requires “righteousness,” or purity, on our part; but even after commitment to Christ our own good works and deeds are totally insufficient. The only righteousness God sees as pure and acceptable is that of His Son. Nothing else will work.

**More better news!** God “imputes” or freely gives His Son’s

righteousness to those who place their faith in Him. Though undeserved, He “credits” us with His Son’s righteousness.

Paul wrote:

*...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.<sup>5</sup>*

Essentially, that is the gospel, the good news—the greatest message and the greatest love story the world has ever heard. This is the message of reconciliation, the message of *grace*, maybe the most wonderful word in the entire Bible.

Now you have a new job description! Christ has named you as His personal ambassador:

*He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us<sup>1</sup>* (emphasis supplied).

As His ambassador, always remember the reason for your new title: *grace*. Meditate on that word. Savor it. It means “unmerited favor,” or receiving something good that you do not deserve, whereas *mercy* means not receiving something bad that you do deserve. God’s grace is the subject of one of the greatest hymns ever written. Believers for over 200 years have been singing:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found —  
was blind but now I see.  
‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear  
And grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.<sup>6</sup>

In case you have never done so, this can be your *hour*. You can receive that same grace, right now, if you believe, just like the Bible and the old song says.

## Chapter 7

# The Mysterious Name

There is only one name in all of history so revered and so feared that millions of people would not even utter it, and still don't. Because of that, it has been called "the Incommunicable Name" and "the Great and Terrible Name."

This "unutterable word," as it is also called, is the Creator's actual name as He revealed it to Moses some 1,500 years before Christ. No wonder it has been feared—the warning against profaning it occupies a full ten percent of the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue:

*You shall not misuse the name of \_\_\_\_\_, your God,  
for \_\_\_\_\_ will not hold anyone guiltless who  
misuses his name.<sup>1</sup>*

That stern command and the consequence of disobedience is enough to make any rational person nervous!

What awesome name goes into the above blank spaces? Strangely, most Christians today do not know what it is, and Jews generally still will not pronounce it, instead substituting another word. It is undoubtedly the greatest mystery of name and word usage in history.

The Creator's name is not "God" (from the Hebrew "El" or "Elohim"). God is really a generic word used also with a small "g" in the Bible for pagan deities. His name is not "Lord." This is also a generic word meaning "master," the same word that is also used to refer to human masters. In both



cases, distinction is attempted by capitalization. But the Creator did not give Himself a name to be shared with pagan deities or humans, even with capitalization. Actually, God and Lord are titles and not personal names.

Neither is His name “Jehovah,” a word invention of late medieval origin. Strangely, Jehovah is still popularly but mistakenly used as the Creator’s name even though scholars and seminary graduates have known for years that it is incorrect. This is due to tradition, and also because some ministers wrongly give precedence to their *King James Version* of the Bible, which uses Jehovah, over the original languages of inspired Scripture.

The Creator’s actual name is unique and exclusive. Its origin is from the beginning of time, and its meaning, as we shall see, is descriptive of the nature of its owner. And it is a fascinating fact that the mystery surrounding the name was apparently anticipated by early Hebrew Scripture itself. Hundreds of years before Christ, the mystery of the name was referred to in the Book of Proverbs. After describing the Creator’s mighty power, it teasingly asks:

*What is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?*<sup>22</sup>

Other translations say, “Tell me if you know!” or “Surely you know!” This amazing verse not only infers a riddle associated with the Creator’s name but prophetically refers to the name of the Son who, although existent in heaven, was not even born on the earth yet! So the Son’s name, too, is somewhat of a mystery.

### **What is His name?**

Well, what is it? What is the name that has struck fear in the hearts of millions of people for thousands of years, and still does?

The Creator revealed His name in the Hebrew language; it appears more than 6,000 times in the Old Testament, or Jewish Bible. Here it is:

יהוה

Reading from right to left, as is done in Hebrew, it contains the four consonants, in English YHWH (sometimes written YHVH). Scholars call these famous four letters the “Tetragrammaton” (*tetra* for *four*). Though its pronunciation was long obscure, there is now

almost general agreement among scholars that the correct vowel insertions should be YaHWeH, making the actual and original name *Yahweh*. The short form, *Yah*, appears in “hallelujah,” meaning “praise you, Yah.” The letter “j” was strangely substituted about three centuries ago, but not pronounced. Hallelujah is a universal praise word spoken by people of many languages all over the world. Sometimes people use hallelujah carelessly and without knowledge of its meaning or profound implications. I once heard it in a TV soft drink commercial. Humanity’s ignorance and disregard of sacred truth is sad and disturbing.

On one occasion God spoke through the prophet, Isaiah, and said very pointedly:

*I am ‘Yahweh,’ that is my name!*<sup>3</sup>

And after He had revealed His name to Moses, God said:

*This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.*<sup>4</sup>

Has humanity complied with that command to remember? Obviously not. That’s the purpose of this chapter. After you read it you will know something of great spiritual and historical significance, and hopefully of great personal value and blessing.

### **Why the greatest name was almost lost**

The problem started in Old Testament times when the rabbis, fearful of violating the commandment and even inadvertently profaning the sacred name, overreacted and eliminated its use altogether in temple worship by substituting another word. Even today, thousands of years later, when Jews see the Hebrew word, YHWH, they usually pronounce it “Adonai,” the word for “Lord.”

Curious about the practice, I have asked Jewish acquaintances why they still do this. One admitted that he was superstitious. Another replied, “We are not 100 percent sure that ‘Yahweh’ is the correct pronunciation of YHWH.” He was correct, but he preferred a word we know as 100 percent wrong to one we know is maybe 99 percent right!

I include this to demonstrate the deep roots of tradition and superstition, but not to be critical. Their reverence is admirable,

certainly more so than the flippant attitude often given to matters of deity by many Gentiles.

This practice of substitution continued when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, and centuries later into English. Most modern Bibles today follow this practice and substitute “the LORD” (all caps) for the Creator’s name, even while admitting it is wrong. For example, the introduction to the *New English Bible* (Oxford University Press) says: “In course of time, the true pronunciation of the divine name, probably ‘Yahweh,’ passed into oblivion and YHWH was read with the intruded vowels, the vowels of an entirely different word, namely ‘my Lord’ or ‘God’.... *the present translators have retained this incorrect but customary form*” (emphasis supplied).

In some Bibles, the sacred name is mentioned as a footnote, such as *The Living Bible* (Tyndale House Publishers). It comments on its use of “Jehovah” in Exodus 3:14 by adding in small print, “Properly the name should be pronounced ‘Yahweh.’”

*The Criswell Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers) footnote on the same verse says, “YAHWEH... (is) the personal name of God.”

### **First century status of the name**

What was the status of the sacred name during the time of Christ? The *Jewish Encyclopedia* quotes the first-century philosopher, Philo:

The four letters may be mentioned or heard only by holy men whose ears and tongues are purified by wisdom, and by no others in any place whatsoever.

First century Jewish and Roman historian Josephus wrote:

Moses besought God to impart to him the knowledge of His name and its pronunciation so that he might be able to invoke Him by name at the sacred acts, whereupon God communicated His name, hitherto unknown to any man; and it would be a sin for me to mention it.

Apparently, by the time of Christ the name had virtually been removed from use in Judaism. This may help explain what Jesus meant when He prayed:

*I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it.*<sup>5</sup>

Actually, an early messianic prophecy fulfilled by Jesus said:

*I will declare thy name unto my brethren.*<sup>6</sup>

Of course, these statements probably have a broader meaning than just that of declaring the sacred name, Yahweh. They also probably mean the declaration of God's total Person to the world.

### **And what is His Son's name?**

This is the other question asked by the writer of Proverbs hundreds of years before Christ came into the world. While we are almost certain of the name "Yahweh," the name of the Son is somewhat less certain, although we have some good clues.

The problem is that we know it was a Hebrew name, but the New Testament records are in Greek. These not only followed tradition and changed YHWH to the word for "Lord," but also changed the Son's name to a Greek word, *Iesous* (pronounced ee-ay-sooce'). In English it later became "Jesus," an Anglicized rendering of the Greek. Jesus is a beautiful name to which most people are accustomed, but it is a relatively recent derivation. It did not even appear in the original *King James Version* of the Bible in 1611 which contained no "J," a recent letter of the alphabet, all of which may surprise many.

So, His real name was not Jesus, nor was His last name Christ. Actually, Christ is from the Greek word for the Hebrew word for "Messiah," meaning Anointed One, a title which confirms His deity, but not a name. Christ and Messiah mean the same.

But what did his mother Mary call him, and his friends? Well, we know from Matthew 1:21 that the angel's announcement conveyed the meaning of "salvation." There is general agreement, therefore, that the last part of his name is "shua" from the Hebrew word for salvation. His actual name is normally rendered as "Yeshua," or simply "Y'shua." Scholarly references usually include an expanded form, "Yehoshua," which is also the same name given to Joshua (Numbers 13:16).

Strangely, Jesus and Joshua have the same Hebrew name, transliterated the same in the Greek, sometimes even used

interchangeably, but they are rendered differently in English. Many scholars believe that Joshua was an Old Testament symbol, or forerunner, of Jesus; he led his people to the promised land, or place of blessing.

Yehoshua is translated “Yahweh is salvation,” or “Yahweh saves.” It contains the first three letters, YHW, of the four-consonant divine name, the Tetragrammaton. Fine points of Hebrew grammar change letter sounds in pronunciation.

In the Old Testament, or Jewish Bible, a suffix was frequently added to the name Yahweh to indicate His provision for humanity’s needs, such as Yahweh-Shalom (Yahweh our peace). The central message of the New Testament is that Yahweh Himself appeared in the flesh for humanity’s salvation. It is logical and consistent that He would carry the same name but with the added meaning of His mission and purpose—human salvation.

The connection between the Old Testament Yahweh and the New Testament Jesus (Yehoshua) is often missed even by otherwise informed students. For example, the real meaning of the popular verses Romans 10:9 and I Corinthians 12:3, where both use the same expression, “Jesus is LORD,” is not always understood properly. The expression is often thought of as meaning to confess Jesus as “Master” of one’s life. But in an interesting footnote, the *New International Version Study Bible* (Zondervan Bible Publishers) points out:

The Greek word for ‘LORD’ here is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to translate the Hebrew name Yahweh.

Thus, the popular confession of “Jesus is LORD” really means, but was lost in translations, “*Jesus is Yahweh*”—that He was the God of the Old Testament in human form! This is an incredibly profound truth, and according to 1 Corinthians 12:3 such insight can only come from a revelation by the Holy Spirit. These passages become compatible with other Bible principles that stress *grace* and *faith* as triggering salvation instead of human works. The “LORD” or “Master” meaning implies that salvation is dependent upon human

deeds—“allowing” Jesus to be the absolute Master of one’s life. This is an ideal we should all strive for, but, realistically, no one achieves it absolutely. If a criterion for salvation, no one would qualify because without grace, God’s requirement for performance is absolute and total, not partial.

Can you see that “Jesus—or Yehoshua (Yahweh saves)—is Yahweh?” If so, that is evidence that you have personally received divine revelation and the Holy Spirit is working in your life.

### **Is God’s name important?**

Many sincere scholars believe that it is not important to know and use the Creator’s actual name, Yahweh. For example, the Editorial Board of the *New American Standard Bible* (The Lockman Foundation) explains why they omitted it:

This name conveys no religious or spiritual overtones. It is strange, uncommon, and without sufficient religious and devotional background.

But this view is not unanimous. The respected *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* (Fleming H. Revell Company) says:

The substitution of the word LORD is most unhappy; for, while it in no way represents the meaning of the sacred name, the mind has constantly to guard against its lower uses, and above all, the direct personal bearing of the name on the revelation of God through the whole course of Jewish history is kept injuriously out of sight.

It should be mentioned that “Yahweh” is used instead of “the LORD” in the popular Catholic *Jerusalem Bible*, (Doubleday and Company).

Is God’s name really important? You must decide in view of the Scriptures and the many human opinions, including this writer’s. Here are some more thoughts.

Is your name important? A name identifies its owner. It’s a personal thing. And a relationship is difficult without the use of personal names. How would you like it for those you love the most to never call you by your name, or not even know it, calling you something else? You would still love them but the relationship would lack a degree of intimacy.

The name Yahweh actually contains the nature of God. Its root meaning in Hebrew is that of self-derived eternal existence as well as, according to some linguists, causation, changelessness, and eternal presence. Thus, the name is holy. In what we call “the Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus taught us to pray, “Hallowed be thy name” (the very *first* and thereby perhaps highest priority phrase of the prayer). Oddly, most of us have prayed this thousands of times without even knowing what the name is!

There are scores of references to the sacred name in the Bible with exhortations to bless it, praise it, exalt it, and use it. Here are a few:

*Bless Yahweh. bless his holy name!*<sup>7</sup>

*O Yahweh. how majestic is thy name in all the earth!*<sup>8</sup>

*Let us exalt his name together!*<sup>9</sup>

*Sing praises to his name. his name is Yah.*<sup>10</sup>

*Thy name is as ointment poured forth.*<sup>11</sup>

*Let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.*<sup>12</sup>

Here is a blessing that many have discovered, a way to increase the intimacy of your relationship with your Creator. When you talk to Him in prayer, call Him by His personal name! Some people report a reality never before experienced.

And here’s a wonderful and scriptural exercise for you. In Hebrew, the word “bless” (*barak*) literally means “to adore on bended knee.” Implement that first verse above (“Bless Yahweh. bless his holy name”) by bending your knees and saying to your Creator, “I adore you, Yahweh. I adore your holy name.”

**Caution.** There are some cultic groups that use and overemphasize to the extreme the name, Yahweh, but deny many of the Bible’s basic teachings. On one hand they claim to profess the Savior, but on the other hand they have disdain for the very New Testament in which He is revealed because it is in Greek and they are obsessed with the Hebrew language, only one of the two major languages God used for the Scriptures. Neither do they understand the old covenant vs. the new covenant. One should avoid the

theological confusion of these groups. But cults also use the terms “Jehovah,” “Lord,” and “Jesus,” so don’t let their use of Yahweh discourage you from knowing and using your Creator’s name.

In conclusion, I hope this message duplicates for you the effects of Moses’ own declaration of the holy name, as he described it:

*My teaching shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew... because I will publish the name of Yahweh.*<sup>13</sup>



## Chapter 8

# The Mysterious Life

There are three major, mysterious consequences resulting from the mysterious experience of the mysterious secret and mysterious message previously described:

1. A mysterious, new, and better life in this world, and
2. An assurance and hope of a better life to come, also a big mystery, and
3. The beginning in this life of an invisible and mysterious war!

We will address each point, in order.

This book emphasizes the new covenant, or eternal blood covenant. God initially spoke of it through the Hebrew prophets, then later implemented it. As quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit said through the prophet Jeremiah:

*This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.*<sup>1</sup>

The old covenant under the (Old Testament) law was an external thing. All over the world today “religion,” per se, is largely an adherence to an external set of rules, standards, and rituals. Unfortunately, even some Christian circles have complex rituals and have not escaped the mindset that religion is “doing” (or not doing) something rather than “being” (the “being” will always result in a

“doing,” but the former is causative). However, the *new covenant* was intended to be, and is, a unique and profound internal phenomenon.

The Old Testament law, or Law of Moses, was described by Paul as a “custodian” until the Messiah came. The analogy has sometimes been used of a fence that restricts a child from going into the street and hurting himself. The fence is a custodian and only restricts; it doesn’t change the desire of the child to go into the street. Ideally, the child’s desire would be changed, making the fence unnecessary. The law would be “in the heart.”

There was once a brilliant, atheistic teacher who delighted in attacking young Christian students. He tried to demolish them with his clever arguments. He knew all the answers, he thought. One day he was scheduled to counsel a young lady who was known to be unashamed of her faith. The teacher couldn’t wait. He purposed to “put her in her place” and destroy her silly notions about this so-called Christ, especially the resurrection. They met, and the teacher skillfully berated her, trying to tear down everything she believed in. Finally, the young lady politely said, “But sir, I know that Jesus rose from the dead. I know that He’s alive.”

Surprised, the angry teacher exclaimed, “But how can you be so sure?”

With a sweet smile and total assurance, she replied, “I just know it’s true because He lives in my heart.”

In a swift reversal, the teacher’s own intellectual arguments were destroyed, and he was totally disarmed by the young lady’s experiential testimony. He was not prepared for that, and he had no argument. She communicated and radiated a reality that he could not explain. This is a true story. Sometime after this experience, this Jewish teacher became a believer in the Messiah and later a powerful teacher of the Bible whose own life has impacted many all over the world.

The story is important because it demonstrates an important principle regarding this “new life.” It is not just a new way of looking at things. It is not just a new orientation or philosophy. You may look

the same in the mirror. You may sound the same. In many ways you may act the same (although there may be some notable exceptions!). But you are *not* the same, because, according to the Bible, you have a “new life.”

You can’t hear it, touch it, or see it, except its results. But it’s there—in the spirit realm. You can’t see gravity either, or love, or peace, but they are nevertheless real. You see the results of them.

In God’s eyes in the spirit realm, a transformation takes place. Jesus called this experience being “born again” (John 3:3,7), although the phrase is misused and misunderstood today. Paul elaborated on the idea and said:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*<sup>2</sup>

**The kingdom.** Jesus said that this new birth is a birth of the Spirit—a spiritual birth—and that such a new birth is essential for entering “the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This is an eternal kingdom, where Christ is King, and it operates on spiritual, eternal principles that are not the same as those of this temporal world and, in fact, they often work in the exact opposite way. For example:

This world says, “Show me and I’ll believe you.”

But God says, “Believe me and I’ll show you.”

This world says, “Get.”

But God says, “Give.”

This world says, “Me first.

But God says, “Others first.”

This world says, “Get revenge.”

But God says, “Forgive.”

This world says, “Hurt your enemies.”

But God says, “Bless you enemies.”

This world says, “I deserve what I get.”

But God says, “My *mercy* does not give you what you really deserve, and my *grace* gives you what you do not deserve.

This world says, “Save your life and not lose it.

But God says, “Lose your life to save it.” (Matthew 10:39.)

This world says, “It’s all about me.”

But God says, “It’s all about Me!”

This kingdom is not just in the future, but it exists in the here and now. And Jesus exhorted us to seek this kingdom first above all things.

In his book, *Lord, Increase Our Faith*<sup>2A</sup>, Dr. Michael Landsman gives interesting insights on what it means to seek the kingdom, and characteristics of the kingdom:

In actual fact, the word “kingdom,” in the original language, means the activity of reigning. For the believer, the activity of reigning is broken down into three aspects: bringing deliverance to the captives, exerting authority over the enemy, and conferring blessings upon God’s people.

Landsman says that if we are truly seeking God’s kingdom, we are not just praying and reading the Bible, but actually doing these three things doing kingdom activities: “bringing deliverance to the captives, exerting authority over the enemy, and conferring blessings upon God’s people.”

This kingdom is a fascinating subject in itself, which overlaps this book. We will not further explore it here, but it deserves your additional study.

### **The mysterious new life**

What is this new life, and why is it so great? Is it just a retread of our old self, or turning over a new leaf? Hardly.

Several years ago a selected group of famous theologians around the nation was asked to list what they thought were the greatest principles taught by Paul the apostle in his letters. Paul was encountered and instructed by the resurrected Christ Himself, and on one occasion was transported to heaven and given special revelations.

The theologians listed several. Of course, “justification by faith” was agreed among them all. But so was another principle that is one of the least understood and appreciated among believers today, and that is “union with Christ.”

**This is Part 2 of the secret revealed at the end of Chapter 4** and is one of the most astounding and mind-boggling phenomena described in the Bible. It is a repeated and persistent theme, and not just an isolated reference.

Here is exactly what happens: At the moment that *grace* comes to you when you believe in Jesus and what He did, the Spirit of God Himself comes and takes *residence* in you, joining Himself with you and you to Him. *You become one*. It is an experiential happening. Not theoretical—real.

Prior to that event, your spirit was real, but “dead” spiritually, or void of God’s own life. In such a condition one might even think that it is God, not oneself, who is dead, as do many today. But God’s life is the only true life in the universe, a never-ending, positive life of love, joy and peace. When your spirit is joined with His, you, too, have that eternal life. You are in union with that life. He lives “inside” of you.

The young lady in the Chapter 4 story was referring to this when she said, “He (Jesus) lives in my heart.” The Bible declares:

*He who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*<sup>3</sup>

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*<sup>4</sup>

*To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*<sup>5</sup>

In the same passage containing this last verse, Paul refers to this “Christ in you” phenomenon as “*the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.*”

Remember the previous chapter and the “inter-union” principle of the blood covenant? Our inter-union with God is as a result of this covenant. This is difficult to understand because it is mystical and spiritual. It does not conform to our physical frame of reference. But neither does God. What could be more mystical than thinking that a Supreme Being could create the universe out of nothing? Or what could be more mystical than thinking that the death of a person

almost 2,000 years ago could affect your eternal destiny? So don't worry about the reality of spiritual principles. They are not only real; they are *more real* than physical principles. Why? Because all visible matter is temporal, whereas spiritual reality and principles are eternal. That's why the Bible exhorts us to let our minds be set on eternal things.

### **I live; yet not I**

When, by faith, grace comes to us, God so completely identifies with us that He considers us to have actually been on the cross with Jesus. Our "old self" literally died with Him and a "new self" rose with Him in the resurrection. In describing this wonderful paradox, Paul exclaimed:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*<sup>6</sup>

That's the way God looks at us. That's why He can look upon us as "perfect," even though it doesn't appear that we are. When He looks at us He sees our sins dealt with on the cross in His Son, and He sees the Son instead of our old self. He sees us through blood-stained glasses, so to speak—the blood of His Son. And the more we can, by faith, see ourselves the same way God sees us, the more spiritual and eternal reality can break through and be manifested in this temporal, material existence.

### **Outside (inside) help**

This is not just abstract theology, but a tremendously practical application results. When one receives Christ, one really receives the Holy Spirit—that aspect of God's being that is manifest in the world today, coming after Christ ascended bodily into heaven.

The Holy Spirit is described as the Comforter, Helper, Counselor, and Spirit of Truth—a "He" and not an "it"—the Spirit-person of God Himself. Before He departed, Jesus said:

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another*

*Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*<sup>7</sup>

The Holy Spirit does, in fact, help, comfort, counsel, guide, protect, illuminate, teach, and empower, to name a few of His activities. He is, really, the ever-present and indwelling Christ.

Believers often discover the importance of the Holy Spirit the hard way. Our own zeal and energy can carry us but so far. We seem to run out of steam in trying to live the Christian life and serve God with our own efforts. We then learn a great truth: We literally cannot do it, and do it consistently. This experience teaches us that only the indwelling Christ can do it through us.

The late Corrie Ten Boom, World War II Holocaust survivor, author, and speaker, describes it this way:

I have a glove in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, it can do many things. True, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. We are gloves. It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the hand, who does the job. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled.

We experientially learn of that great paradox mentioned above: “*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*” And we need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, “so that every finger is filled.”

### **We are not alone**

This is the profound truth of the Christian experience in this life. We are not just looking forward to the sweet bye-and-bye, but we begin to experience God Himself in this life. Upon entrusting oneself to Christ, one immediately obtains a constant companion and partner. Jesus said:

*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*<sup>8</sup>

With this promise and reality God has provided an answer to one of the deepest and most pervasive problems of humanity—

loneliness. People can be lonely even in a crowd of other people or when constantly surrounded by relatives and friends. It is a spiritual loneliness, a sense of isolation in the universe—an emptiness. It can be hell on earth, a little taste of what eternity would be like without God's presence. On one occasion when describing the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said:

*He lives with you and will be in you*<sup>9</sup>

The internal presence of the Holy Spirit helps us to overcome the trials, temptations, problems, and hurts of this life and this world. God's people are not immune to these things. Look what happened to Jesus Himself. And all but one of the original apostles were martyred for telling the "good news." But there's a big difference. God is with us to the end—helping, comforting, and encouraging.

He didn't promise to spare us from all troubles, but to be with us and help us as we go through them.

### **Gifts and fruit of the Spirit**

The Holy Spirit's presence is not just an inward experience, but also an outward one. If we are, indeed, "dwelling places" for God's Spirit, does it not make sense that this "other Person" inside of us would like to express Himself? He surely would not like to remain mute. Actually, there are many things that God wants to do on the earth, and He has chosen to operate through people—through people to people. God loves people.

If God is so sovereign and so powerful and can do anything, why would He choose mere humans to do His work? He could assign millions of powerful angels to do anything He wants. Rusty Stephens, a member of the Navigators Christian ministry, explains how he came to understand this:

As I feverishly pushed the lawn mower around our yard, I wondered if I'd finish before dinner. Mikey, our six year old, walked up and without even asking, stepped in front of me and placed his hands on the mower handle. Knowing that he wanted to help me, I quit pushing. The mower quickly slowed to a stop. Chuckling inwardly at his struggles, I resisted the urge to say, 'Get out of here,



kid. You're in my way,' and said instead, 'Here, son, I'll help you.' As I resumed pushing, I bowed my back, leaned forward, and walked spread-legged to avoid colliding with Mikey. The grass cutting continued, but more slowly and less efficiently than before, because Mikey was 'helping' me. Suddenly, tears came to my eyes as it hit me: This is the way my heavenly Father allows me to 'help' him build his kingdom! I pictured my heavenly Father at work seeking, saving, and transforming the lost, and there I was, with my weak hands, 'helping.' My Father could do the work by himself, but He doesn't. He chooses to stoop graciously to allow me to co-labor with Him. Why? For my sake, because he wants me to have the privilege of ministering with him.

When you commit your life to Him, you become His vessel. You have new purpose and have become what He created you to be.

This story about a little girl helps clarify the matter:

On the way home from church, the little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

The mother said, "Oh! Why is that?"

The girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

"Yes, that's true," the mother replied.

"He also said that God lives within us. Is that true too?"

Again the mother replied, "Yes."

"Well," said the girl. "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?"

Cute story and, indeed, God does "show through" us if we let Him, but it is a cardinal principle that God will not usurp our wills. If He did so, we would merely be automatons and not the free moral agents He wanted in creation. Therefore, He expresses Himself through us as we allow Him. He desires to "reign" in our hearts and lives, but only with our permission.

**God's power.** This "other Person" in our lives is described as having incredible power—the power that formed the heavens and

also raised Christ from the dead. It is the power of an infinite number of nuclear explosions rolled into one. And the Bible reveals that as God indwells us, He wants His power to flow through us. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples:

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.*<sup>10</sup>

The Greek word for power here is *dunamis*, where we get the word for dynamite. The disciples did receive it, giving that original small group of believers and later others the ability to shake the world. People today pray for and receive that same Holy Spirit power, and they, too, shake the world around them for Christ. Scholars do not agree on whether all believers have that latent power which can be released by faith-inspired action, or whether it is a special endowment, requested and received by faith. My own study and experience strongly indicate the latter. But we do know for sure that it is real, and that “faith” is the channel of release.

Like dynamite, spiritual power is only latent until it is released, both of which require a detonator. Faith is the detonator. Also, many believers, including pastors, report “powerless” lives until they prayed and asked for the Spirit’s empowering and equipping for service, then receiving it by faith. Our finite minds cannot understand the process; we only know of its reality. Again, for insights into this and how to be a channel of God’s power, see my book, *The Power!* (Xulon Press, 2003), available through bookstores or online book sellers, or from the publisher at <http://www.xulonpress.com/bookstore>.

God’s power is dynamite power, but yet it is a controlled power. The actual fruit, or some say “personality,” of this Person’s life in our lives is described as:

*...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*<sup>11</sup>

It seems strange but also logical that the Spirit-Creator wants to express His own life and actions on Planet Earth through its human inhabitants as He is allowed to indwell and guide them. And all of God’s purposes are constructive, positive, and helpful in every aspect of human activity.

At the end of human history, the saddest commentary will be that humanity “quenched” the activity of God’s Spirit<sup>12</sup> and brought all its problems upon itself.

### Hope

We have talked about *faith*, and we have talked about *love*. There’s one more element of the famous triad that remains. Mental health professionals declare that this other element is essential for human life. Without it we can die.

That element is *hope*, which comes with the mysterious new life. Hope is about the future.

It’s fun to have something to look forward to, isn’t it? It adds zest to our lives.

Expectation makes it easier to get out of bed in the mornings. Something is ahead that we can anticipate doing or seeing, and it’s exciting. It gives us an inner motivation to keep on going. We humans need something good to hope for and to anticipate.

Without hope, some say, we can die. With nothing to live for there is just despair; the future is bleak, blank, and void of meaning. Some people tragically find themselves in this condition. With nothing to look forward to in this life or a life beyond, they reach their end. Some people go into depression. Others anesthetize themselves with alcohol or drugs. Some try to lose themselves in certain activities. Some commit suicide. “Misery loves company,” so some spread their misery to others by becoming philosophers of despair, expressing themselves in music, literature, and art. The world is full of it. An example is the philosophy of existentialism, which the dictionary defines as “A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, and regards human existence as unexplainable.” This dark, depressing philosophy has found expression in many parts of the culture.

Those who reject God have a meaningless existence—really worse than an animal, which cannot contemplate its mortality—and a future completely void of any hope.

Several years ago a famous movie star expressed this while on his deathbed. His loving daughter was at his bedside. His final, tragic words to her were, “I’ll never see you again,” and in seconds he was gone. He had no hope.

A famous atheist spent a lifetime denouncing God. But on his deathbed, he was overcome with fear. He screamed in anguish at the thoughts of his imminent death and what was ahead for him, while at the same time cursing the God whose existence he had always denied. He had no hope.

A medical doctor’s life was dramatically affected when a dying man, moments before his death, clutched the doctor and begged, “Save me. Oh, please save me. I don’t want to go to hell.” He then died, without hope.

The darkness of hell will have a total and pervasive sense of hopelessness. Ultimately, that will be a chief characteristic in a Christless eternity. It will be the maximum horror. Some may scoff at hell’s fire, but total hopelessness will be a worse fate. Sadly, people choose their own eternal destiny.

But in Christ, we have indescribable hope—not only for God’s companionship and help in this life, but for the life beyond, where those who are lost in darkness and hopelessness will be forever erased from our memories.

**Heaven.** God has promised an endless existence in Paradise with Himself to those who will accept His gift—free to us but purchased with His own blood.

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*<sup>13</sup>

The verse does not say, “prepared for everyone.” It says, “*prepared for those who love him.*” The oft-heard phrase at funerals, “He is in a better place,” is not always true and is tragically wrong. Sometimes the deceased is in a place far worse than anyone’s imagination.

We know very little about this future existence “*for those who*

*love Him.*” Only limited information has been given. With our finite minds it is really impossible to imagine an infinite existence; thus, “*no mind has conceived....*” But God has revealed some things about it. In the same passage as above, it reads, “*but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*”

One thing we know is that Jesus is there in the glory of His deity, and we will see Him. While on the earth He prayed:

*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*<sup>14</sup>

Actually, He “went ahead” of us to prepare things for those who would put their trust in Him:

*In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am, there ye may be also.*<sup>15</sup>

We know that it will be a place where there is no sickness, pain, sorrow, or death. No cancer. No heart attacks. No arthritis. No AIDS. No aging. Perfect and permanent health and well-being. No hospitals. No (practicing) doctors.

Not a trace of defilement or corruption. No deception or misrepresentation (no radio or television commercials!). No theft. No crime. Nothing but truthfulness and honesty. No (practicing) lawyers.

No immorality. No wars. No conflict. No worry or anxiety. No taxes! No Internal Revenue Service. No mean, partisan politics. No depressing newspapers or television network news. Nothing but good news.

A constant *joy*. A perfect *peace*. A pervasive *love*.

We will see departed loved ones who had placed their trust in Christ. There will be a grand and glorious reunion. What a happy experience to see each other again in an infinite, endless existence free of troubles! We will also meet people of history, some famous, who died in Christ and who lived before us, with us, and after us. I believe we will be able to have relaxed conversations with them. What a thrill!

A few years ago, legendary basketball player “Pistol Pete” Maravich unexpectedly died of a heart attack at the age of 40. But not long before he died Pete had committed his life to Christ. He testified that he finally had peace, a peace he had never known before. Pete is with Jesus now. Someday we can meet Pete and, who knows, maybe play a little ball with him. I trust my skills will be somewhat better. But never like “Pistol Pete,” one of the best ever.

There will be some sort of meaningful, enjoyable and fruitful activity. The beauty will be unimaginable. Light will be from the brightness of God Himself; no sun or other light will be necessary. His being will radiate the light. There will be colors and sounds that are beyond the present ability of our limited senses to perceive, and music beyond the ability of a thousand Mozarts and Beethovens to compose. For example, our present physical bodies can see and hear only an extremely thin slice of the visual and audible frequency spectrums. There is much, much more even in the physical world that we cannot see than what we can see, and more that we cannot hear than what we can hear.

In the best imagery of human language, structures of precious stones and streets of pure gold, “transparent as glass,” are described.

Who all will be there? That is the big question. But we have the answer. The Book of Revelation, the last book of the entire Bible, gives us the answer:

*Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*<sup>16</sup>

There’s that word *Lamb* again. We started talking about the Lamb in Chapter 1 and can’t get away from Him. He’s in the first book of the Bible and in the last book.

The apostle John was given a vision of heaven. He described the Lamb’s eyes as a flame of fire, His voice like the sound of many waters, His face like the sun shining in full strength, and on His head many diadems.

*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.*<sup>17</sup>

John also heard singing to the Lamb:

*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*<sup>18</sup>

Then John reported that he heard every creature saying:

*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!*<sup>19</sup>

A peaceful, eternal, and heavenly existence is the assurance and hope of every person who puts his trust in Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lamb of God.

### **The blessed hope—He’s coming back!**

There will be one generation of humans that will experience a startling event and see Jesus in person while on the earth! They will be alive when the Messiah makes his prophesied second appearance in power and majesty, unlike His first coming in humility, to die for our sins. This is a theme of both the Old and New Testaments. The “Second Coming” of Christ is referred to approximately 318 times in the New Testament alone! It is a future fact.

During the 40 days after His resurrection Jesus made many appearances to show Himself alive. He spoke His final words, then:

*After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky?’ This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*<sup>20</sup>

Jesus had previously spoken of this future event. It was to follow the gathering of the scattered people of Israel back to the land. He had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews around the world. The destruction occurred a few years later in

the Jewish-Roman war of A.D. 66-70. Like the Old Testament prophets, He also spoke of a future return of the Jews to their homeland and the retaking of Jerusalem from “the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24), signaling the end of what He called the “times of the Gentiles.”

Now, after some 2,000 years of nonexistence, the nation of Israel has been reestablished just in our generation, on May 14, 1948, and Israel recaptured the holy city, Jerusalem, on June 6, 1967. The Middle East is a powder keg of conflict caused mostly by a hatred of Israel, a Semitic family rivalry going back some 4,000 years. It is also due to petro-dollars and greed, and due to Satan’s intense hatred of the Jews because it was through them that God revealed and enacted His plan of redemption and sent the Messiah. The whole industrialized world is lubricated, fueled by, and dependent upon Middle East oil.

**Satan’s futile efforts to stop God’s plan.** In Queen Esther’s day in Old Testament times (about 2,500 years ago), Satan tried to stop God’s plan of redemption by using the evil Haman to kill all the Jews, but thankfully God protected them through Queen Esther and Haman was hanged. In Jesus’ day (about 2,000 years ago), Satan tried to use King Herod to kill Jesus and again stop God’s plan of redemption by killing all the Jewish babies, but God protected Jesus. In our day, (1930s and 1940s), Satan used Hitler to try to kill all the Jews, which failed and only spurred the creation of the new Jewish state, Israel. Hitler committed suicide. Currently, Islamic radicals, such as Hamas, have declared their intent to do what Haman, Herod and Hitler (the other three H’s) failed to do. But we know from the Bible that they will not succeed and they are in danger of the same grisly fate as Haman and Hitler.

One is reminded of something the Hebrew prophet Zechariah said nearly 500 years before Christ, revealing the crucial role to be played by Jerusalem. He spoke of a time in history when Messiah would return and referred to the “*house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.... when they look upon him whom they have pierced*”



(12:10). Zechariah also said:

*This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves."*<sup>21</sup>

We have seen hints of this already with the entire world economy teetering on the availability and price of Middle East oil and the potential for war. And with few exceptions, the "nations of the earth" in the United Nations are vehemently anti-Israel and supportive of her enemies. Before our eyes, we are seeing the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.

### **A mystery from the prophet Daniel**

In the Introduction at the beginning of this book, the scientific genius Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) was mentioned, and it was noted that *The Columbia History of the World* remarks, "At the end of his days he spent more time studying and writing about the prophecies in the book of Daniel than he did in charting the heavens."

Although brilliant, Newton was still a man, not perfect, and subject to error as all of us. But some of his insights are interesting.

In about 550 B.C., God gave the prophet Daniel a view of history to the end. From chapter 9, verses 24-27, a mystery is revealed about "the 70 weeks of years," or 490 (70 X 7) years into the future, or 7 + 62 + 1 weeks of years. Many scholars believe that prophecy points to the very year that Christ would be born centuries later. Newton believed, as do others, that the same passage also holds the key to the approximate timing of Christ's second coming. (Such a possibility is not precluded by the Bible.) He believed that the recent rebirth of Israel (totally unknown to him some 300 years ago) would be the key

event that would place us somewhere in that window of time at the end of the age.

With great foresight, Newton also wrote:

About the time of the end, a body of men will be raised up who will turn their attention to the prophecies, and insist upon their literal interpretation, in the midst of much clamour and opposition.

### **Another Daniel mystery**

The angel Gabriel seems to be the angel God uses to announce the arrival of His Son on the earth. He was the one who appeared to Mary some 2,000 years ago and announced the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26). A few hundred years earlier, Gabriel was also God's messenger who gave Daniel all this information. Gabriel said that the understanding of the timing of the second coming of Christ was "sealed" until the "time of the end" (Daniel 12:9). In other words, it could not be understood until that special and unknown time in the future.

In addition to other clues, Gabriel gave two key conditions that would prevail at that time: "***travel and education*** (or knowledge) *shall be vastly increased*" (chapter 12, verse 5, *Living Bible*, emphasis supplied).

Now, fast forward about 2,600 years...

**Travel:** World travel, and even between cities and states, was absolutely minimal until the 20th century. For all of human history, whenever people did travel, it was by horse or by walking. Travel began to increase only in modern times with the invention of the internal combustion engine, but it was not until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that travel literally exploded. The main factor was the advent of the jet aircraft engine, first used on a commercial airliner in the 1950s. Almost everyone, except in the most primitive societies, is now traveling. Without a doubt, travel has "vastly increased" since the mid-20th century—not coincidentally about the time of Israel's rebirth!

**Education:** Education and knowledge also exploded in the 20th century. From the time of Christ until 1900, it is estimated that man's knowledge doubled. In just the next 50 years, from 1900 to 1950, it doubled again. Then it began an extremely rapid doubling; first every seven years, then every two years in the 1960's. It appears that the 1950's marked the time in history when knowledge and education "vastly increased" and literally began exploding.

All this means that according to the ancient prophet, Daniel, sometime about 1948 when Israel was reborn (a major end-of-the age sign), God began to unseal, and is now unsealing, the vision of Daniel to give us awareness that Christ's return is near.

Are we really near Christ's return? Based on the many signs, which cannot be included here, millions of Bible scholars and students all over the world say yes, and believe it will be soon. How soon, no one knows. But we are told to look for the signs. There are things we are told that will happen, after which:

*At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.<sup>22</sup>*

**Caught up!** Paul refers to this momentous "caught up" event when he says:

*According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.<sup>23</sup>*

Without question, we have a great hope. There's just nothing like it. Someday, and maybe soon, we will see Him, the One responsible

for the amazing “intelligent design” we see in Creation; the One who formed the universe, the worlds, the flowers, the amazing human body; and the One who chose to take on the frame of a humble servant, and to die for us as a sacrificial Lamb. We will live with Him in an indescribable paradise for ever and ever, without end.

Paul referred to us as waiting...

*for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*<sup>24</sup>

The hope we are awaiting is not fantasy. It is not just wishful thinking. It is as valid as God’s own integrity and promises. It is an inevitable happening. Yet, it is still a hope.

*But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*<sup>25</sup>

### **The mysterious war**

If you have responded to the mysterious message and have entered into the mysterious life, you have entered a mysterious war, a literal but invisible war. It’s every bit as real as an actual military war, and more difficult:

*He that ruleth his spirit (is better) than he that taketh a city.*<sup>26</sup>

Ruling our own spirit is really that “mysterious war.” It is a two-dimensional war.

**Conflict with our “flesh.”** First, our new spirit life, joined with the Holy Spirit, comes in conflict with the fleshly, or human nature side of ourselves. Peter spoke about:

*sinful desires, which war against your soul.*<sup>27</sup>

These are not limited to sexual desires. If expressed according to God’s plan, sexual desires are not evil in themselves but were given by God to propagate humanity. The word “desires” has a broader

meaning. The term “flesh” in the Bible represents our whole sensory being and the physical world’s constant pull against us: things we see, hear, feel or otherwise experience in the world of appearances that may be contrary to spirit-reality and God’s will. It includes the constant temptation toward *selfish* actions instead of *selfless* actions in accordance with the law of love. Paul said:

*The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other.*<sup>28</sup>

Paul even confessed his own struggle in this area, but he also gave us the solution. He told us that even though our old human nature may appear to be alive and may try to assert itself, in God’s eternal perspective the old nature is, in fact, dead, having been buried with Christ. Our practical application of this spirit-truth is, by faith, to “consider” it so, and then act like it. Actually, that’s how all spirit-reality is made to penetrate the sensory world—by *faith inspired action*.

*Count (consider) yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*<sup>29</sup>

At one point, Paul described his personal battle. He cried out in desperation, then followed with the solution:

*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*<sup>30</sup>

**Conflict with evil spirits.** The above conflict is primarily an internal one. The second conflict is from external sources, although the battle is still fought internally. This is the conflict with the devil and his angels, called demons. They are invisible, but very real spirit-beings. They are not omnipotent as God is and have been given only limited domain, primarily through the wills of people who “allow” them, even though perhaps unknowingly.

We will not explore the full scope of the operation of these rebellious angels who were banished from heaven except to mention

that they are a source of part of our battle. On this Paul said:

*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.<sup>31</sup>*

What are the symptoms of a life in the heat of spiritual warfare and under attack by Satan? They can be many and varied. Satan usually plays upon our weak points, which will vary with individuals. He operates in the realm of the mind, suggesting and tempting, but where it seems like our own thoughts. Undiscerning people do not know the difference.

Satan need never be successful in his attacks, but where he is experiencing success symptoms might include coldness, indifference, or antipathy toward things of God and an unusual attraction toward things contrary to spiritual health, such as covetousness, lust, and belligerence. They may include obsessive and detrimental behavior. Symptoms often include a great sense of discouragement, anxiety, hopelessness, fear about the future, or depression. Fear is the opposite of faith, and depression the opposite of hope.

Someone has said, "Fear knocked at my door. I sent faith to answer it, and no one was there."

It should be remembered, however, that demonic influence or attack does not necessarily mean "possession" in the sense of ownership. Satan can only claim and possess those who have rejected God. In fact, a possessed person really has no interest in pleasing God. If you are concerned about yourself and you want to please God, you cannot be possessed. You only need to appropriate your victory in the present battle, as described below.

### **Prescription for victory**

After describing the battle, Paul then prescribes the solution to the warfare, a spiritual "armor" that will allow us to win in this inevitable struggle. He tells us to be "*strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might,*" clothing ourselves with God's provisions for victory, such as truth, peace and faith (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

Such a struggle may seem like bad news. One might say, “Why bother? Who needs all of that?” Well, it’s really good news. You see, if you do not enter the battle, you actually surrender without a fight. You have already lost and are captive to both your sensory self and the spiritual forces of darkness in the universe. That is not a viable alternative. Also, it is only through a “battle” that a “victory” can be obtained. We have been called to battle, and most importantly, to victory.

In the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, Jesus gives some wonderful promises to those who “overcome” and who obtain victory. He knows how tough it is. Remember, He walked this way. He has been there, done that. And He has purposed to help us. There is a simple remedy, described by the apostle John:

*This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.*<sup>32</sup>

The faith referred to is faith in God and His blood sacrifice which, through our confession, mysteriously renders Satan powerless and defeated. This idea is repeated in another verse which speaks of the believers’ victory over Satan:

*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*<sup>33</sup>

In his majestic and beautiful hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” written over 400 years ago, Martin Luther translates this remedy into a simple method of defeating Satan:

The prince of darkness grim  
We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure,  
One little word shall fell him.

Our inner faith, which itself is a gift from God, and our words and actions that spring forth from that faith, give us sure victory over self and Satan in that mysterious war—the greatest of all conflicts.

## Chapter 9

# The Mysterious Conversation

There are five reasons why the “conversation” referred to in this chapter is mysterious. In fact, it is *very* mysterious. Consider:

1. One party of the conversation is actually invisible.
2. That same party never gives an audible reply, yet there is always a reply. (A few have reported audible replies, or so strong they seemed audible.)
3. The conversation is always free to us, paid for by the other party.
4. The other party’s line is never busy.
5. The other party is always available.

On this last point, have you ever tried to talk to the mayor of your city by telephone? Or get a personal appointment? It would be difficult, especially in a large city.

What about the governor of your state? Can you imagine how difficult it would be to make an appointment with the governor to unhurriedly discuss things that are personally important to you?

Or consider the President of the United States, or the head of state in any country where you may reside. It would be virtually impossible. You would not even get through to the secretary. Forget it.

The above people are humans, just like us. They put on their



clothes, eat, brush their teeth, and do everything else just like any other person. Even if you could see them, you would have to make an appointment, usually far in advance. And when you found yourself actually in their presence, you would probably experience a feeling of awe and privilege. That's because they are important people. They have a lot of authority. But just human authority, of course.

Now compare their importance and authority with that of the Creator of over 100 billion galaxies in which our solar system and entire galaxy are less than a speck—the King of kings and Lord of lords—the One who is enthroned in the heavens and sovereign over all creation. It's really silly to even compare.

But the absolutely amazing thing is that you can meet with and converse with this King at any moment of any day, for any length of time, about any subject.

You don't have to go through a secretary. You don't even need an appointment. In a sense, you can really just "barge right in" any old time—respectfully, of course. Actually, He's delighted to hear from us, so much so that He's always ready.

This act of conversation with the Creator is a mysterious phenomenon called *prayer*.

Too often prayer is regarded as a ritualistic burden only to be endured. Anything can be turned into a dreary ritual if we allow it. But like other spiritual truths and realities, in the proper perspective they can be natural, normal, and exciting. Prayer, for example, when viewed in the above light becomes an act of awe, wonder, and privilege.

### **Why pray?**

Prayer is important for several reasons.

1. Prayer is commanded by God, not for Himself, but for us, because He knows we need it.

2. Prayer pleases God. A praying creature recognizes his Creator, who desires a relationship. A relationship without communication is not much of a relationship. Also, proper prayer exalts God with praise and worship for who He is.

3. Prayer keeps us in communication with the One who sustains our life. Actually, His own life and thoughts flow from Him to us as we commune. Failure to pray can block the flow. The famous 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelist Dwight L. Moody remarked, “A believer on his knees sees more than a philosopher on tiptoe.”

4. Prayer facilitates God speaking to us, and to guide and use us for His purposes. His replies may not be audible, but He is never silent.

5. An often overlooked truth is that even though God has all power, He has chosen to let His activities and involvements in human affairs be governed in large part by the prayers of His people. He has a “will” in all matters and is powerful enough to make it happen, but He limits His sovereignty and desires that His people cause that will to be implemented by prayer. This amazing principle allows a divine/human partnership with eternal results. Only a loving God would conceive of such a plan! Such prayer, as aided by the Spirit of God Himself, may be directed toward any subject: nations, leaders, family, friends, self, or any person or situation.

Item 5 needs some clarification. God is not a cosmic errand boy, just waiting for His orders. The principle is much deeper. Only God’s will is ever going to be done through our prayers regardless of what we pray. And our prayers will be more effective if we understand His Word, obey Him, and remain in tune with His will. But the profound principle here involves one of God’s chief attributes described in an earlier chapter—justice. Both justice and love govern God’s actions; they also govern prayer.

With humanity, God has established a race of creatures with a free will. He has purposed not to interfere with that free will. But when we pray, we “permit” or justify (give legal permission to) God to act in a situation where He previously allowed His hands to be tied. We freely choose to invite His intervention. It justifies Him to act if we pray according to His own will. With prayer, both justice and love are served according to the divine plan. He designed the “system” that way.

### How to pray

This will not be a lengthy methodology. Many books have been written on this subject. The Bible contains many examples, principles, and exhortations. I want to keep it simple. I want to just give you the basics.

This book is not intended to be inclusive or give you everything—but just to get you started, or help you along.

There is one principle requirement for entering into God's presence with prayer, a requirement that God revealed through the Hebrew people and that has never changed. The discussion of the ark of the covenant in Chapters 4 and 10 address this principle.

In early Hebrew history, God's presence was within the Holy of Holies within the tabernacle, or temple. He could only be approached by the high priest who entered to sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat. There was no other access to God. The high priest represented all the people. Any of the people's individual prayers throughout the year were made possible by this periodic blood atonement. It gave them access to God Almighty.

This practice ceased in the first century. It ceased because Messiah came as a final and lasting sacrifice for all people everywhere. He is referred to as the "great high priest." It is His own blood that now provides our access to God.

In the old Hebrew tabernacle and temple, there was a *curtain* hanging in front of the Holy of Holies, blocking access to the Mercy Seat. Several strange things happened at the very moment Jesus died on the cross. There was an earthquake. Huge rocks were split in two. Tombs opened and dead people arose and appeared to many. The sun stopped shining. But also, "*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*"<sup>1</sup>

This supernatural occurrence signified that the old way had ceased and that now the Son had provided access to God through His own blood. There is now no more curtain. No more Holy of Holies. No more blood on the Mercy Seat. No more temple. But there is a way, a new way. Yeshua (Jesus) said:

*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*<sup>2</sup>

This is why Jesus repeatedly exhorted us to pray and ask “in my name.” His name is the only name that has credibility in heaven. It is the only name that attracts the attention of the Father and the angels. It represents the only one who paid the price for the access and privilege—the price was His own blood.

You can chant mantras and incantations for months. You can fast for forty days. You can stand on your head, or bang it on the wall or floor. You can bend over and prostrate yourself on the floor several times a day, and face any direction on the compass. You can invoke anyone’s name. You can do anything. But if you do not come in the name of the One whose own divine blood provided the access, you cannot enter the Holy of Holies in the heavenlies and come before God’s presence, because it is His blood that makes it possible.

Remember the chasm we described in Chapter 6? There is just no way across the great chasm separating God and humanity except the way God Himself has provided.

God’s way is the way of mercy. It springs from His own great love and sacrifice. If anyone proclaims another way, such an act ignores what God has done and contemptuously spurns the blood of the eternal covenant; plus, it says that God’s great sacrifice was unnecessary and it makes God a liar. But in reality, any other way is delusion, futile, and an insult to God.

Secular mentality says that such a way is too narrow. Anyone with that view will have to take up the matter with the One who devised it. But it’s certainly not narrow in a major sense in that it is open to anyone of any nationality, race, age, gender, or IQ, without exception. It is only narrow in the sense that truth is narrow. If you are passenger on a flight from San Francisco to Hawaii, there is only one narrow compass heading that will get you there. Would you not want your captain to be narrow in his navigation and follow a very precise compass heading? Likewise, Jesus said that the gate to life is narrow, and He is that gate.

The key, then, is to come before God with *faith* in the Son and His atoning blood sacrifice. Prayer itself and using His name expresses that faith. The Bible reveals that without faith it is not possible to

please God, and also that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.<sup>3</sup>

Prayer is both an exercise of faith and of seeking. We know from the Bible that prayer pleases Him, and that if we are diligent in seeking Him, He will reward us.

### **Other prayer principles**

*Where to pray?* Anywhere. Regardless, in the privacy or “closet” of your heart. Home, car, work, or school.

*When to pray?* Anytime.

*Eyes closed or open?* Either.

*Physical position?* Any.

*How?* For our part, vocalization is scriptural. There is something mystically real about a vocal declaration and profession. But surely, an inward meditation is also heard. On God’s part, He speaks to us in our spirit, usually gently and in a way that comforts and brings peace and assurance. If we have disobeyed Him, it may be more like a rebuke; but if we are repentant, He is quick to forgive, restore, and give peace. A major way to judge whether we are hearing God’s voice is to check it against His Word, the Bible. God will not contradict Himself.

**Subject or object of prayer?** Focus on God and His being. Speak praise and worship. Remember thanksgiving and gratitude. Mention specific needs of yours and others as they come to your mind. Review what is usually called “the Lord’s Prayer” given by Jesus (Matthew 6:9-13) for His guidance on content and priorities.

### **Keys to getting answers to prayer**

If you ask God for something, you obviously want an answer. Here are some keys to getting your prayers answered:

**Pray according to His will.** Sometimes we do not know God’s will in specific situations, and in those cases, we can ask as we feel the need, but we pray as Jesus instructed, saying, “thy will be done,” and fully trust His wisdom, power and love for the outcome.

Don't let that be an excuse when His will already has been revealed to us in His Word and something He wants us to know and believe. An often-ignored fact is that God's will and provision are often clearly revealed in the Bible, if we will just find it, believe it, and act upon it. In fact, it is unbelief and not pleasing to God if we "ask" for something that He has already provided for us in His Word that He wants us apply faith and "take."

The New Testament speaks of us receiving from God. The word "receive" is the Greek *lambano*, which primarily means to "take." We do not passively receive God's promises; we are supposed to exercise our faith in His Word and actively take them.

The late Norman Grubb, noted missionary and author, explained it this way:

It is the act of taking in the invisible, and we suggest that the serious lack in so much of our prayer life, both public and private, is that it hardly gets beyond the stage of asking. Hardly ever do we hear a person in a public prayer meeting, having asked, take and thank; yet probably it is much more important to have "taking" meetings than to have 'asking' meetings. Our constant asking must have the same effect on God as would a child on his parents, who keeps asking for food, when they have set his meal before him and told him to take and eat it.

**Find a Scripture and promise that apply to your need.** Pray His Word back to Him. He wants us to "remind" Him of His Word and promises (Isaiah 43:26). It is not that He is forgetful, but He likes to see us take His Word seriously, and honor it to the point of making our case before Him with it. This will also build your faith to believe, because the Bible says that our faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17).

**Believe that you receive.** If you pray according to the known will of God, then you have a right, indeed, a duty, to believe for your answer. Jesus said that whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe you receive it, then you shall have it (Mark 11:24). Believing also means

*acting* as though it is true. Faith pleases God, and we know that faith without corresponding action is dead (James 2:26).

In prayer, thank God for His promises, “remind” Him of what He has already said, and by faith thank Him for the answer!

If you pray without knowing the will of God in the situation, thank Him anyhow for His faithfulness in answering according to His wisdom and love for you.

**Forgive, and do not hold on to sin.** Jesus said when you pray, make sure you have forgiven anyone you may hold something against (Mark 11:25). The psalmist says that if we cherish evil or sin, God will not hear us (Psalm 66:18). This specifically includes a husband’s treatment of his wife, which is mentioned in 1 Peter 3:7.

### **The power of prayer**

There are millions of examples of the sheer, transcendent power of prayer. I have experienced many, for myself and for others. Here are some examples of prayer power:

**Eye defect healed.** One night in my home Bible study, a neighbor couple, Bob and Barbara Smith, also in the Air Force, began attending. They had recently adopted a beautiful and tiny Korean girl, Sarah. But Sarah had a noticeable defect in both eyes from birth. Arrangements had been made for surgery. But before the surgery, they brought Sarah to our Bible study for prayer. Our study leader laid hands on Sarah, just like in the Bible, and prayed a prayer of faith for her eyes. To everyone’s astonishment, her eye problem immediately corrected itself right before our own eyes! A visit back to the doctor confirmed that the problem was corrected and surgery was no longer needed. Sarah is grown and married now, but many years later, Bob, with whom I am still in contact, recalls that story with emotion.

**Breast lump disappears.** Friend Janie was scheduled to have a biopsy for a lump in her breast. She prayed and others prayed for her. When she went into the hospital, the doctors discovered that the

lump had totally disappeared! There was not even a trace of it. The doctors had no explanation.

**Multiplying the loaves and fishes.** Jesus is still multiplying the loaves and fishes just as He did in Matthew 15:35-38. A few years ago, my wife and I had a buffet dinner party for some other members of the ministry where we were working, and many came. Near the end of the dinner, the food was almost gone, but one couple was very late and had not yet arrived. It appeared that there would be no food left for them. I prayed and left it in the hands of the One to whom nothing is impossible. The late couple finally arrived and went through the food line in the kitchen as though everything was normal. I was amazed to see their plates piled high with food, which seemed in abundance. Then some others came back for seconds and thirds. It was astonishing. And like the loaves and the fishes, there was food left over. Things like this surprise us, but they should not. Experiencing God's miracle power should be part of the normal Christian life, just like in the Bible. Jesus has not changed.

**Another eye miracle.** Retired U.S. Army officer and personal friend William Carr Blood has experienced many miracles in his life, which he has documented in his book, *Miracles! More Than Believing*. One experience that changed his thinking was when he was at a "healing service" and saw a cross-eyed baby prayed for by the evangelist. After the prayer, the baby's eyes were perfectly straight. Bill saw this from only 18 inches away. He knew that a baby cannot fake this and that he had seen a bona fide miracle. Many other miracles have followed in his life.

**More.** These things are exciting and faith-building. Many more such testimonies are documented in my book, *The Power!* also mentioned in Chapters 1 and 8.

**Lesson is all this? Pray! Believe! Expect results!**

Remember: "Some prayer, some power; much prayer, much power; no prayer, no power!"



### **Heavenly review**

Someday in heaven I believe God is going to ask many of us, “Why didn’t you talk to Me more often? There was so much I wanted to do for you and say to you. Remember those problems you were having about (such and such)? But you wouldn’t talk to Me or listen to Me very much. I set up such an easy system for everyone and it is tragic that more people didn’t take full advantage of it.”

We’ll have a lot of excuses. Some may say they were too busy. “Well, Lord, I was pretty busy, you know—meetings, sports, television, and stuff like that.” He may choose to show us the cost of our earthly prioritization, what might have otherwise happened.

Others may say, “Frankly, Lord, I just didn’t feel worthy enough. I figured that people who prayed a lot had to really feel worthy.”

He will remind us that it was His blood that makes us worthy and absolutely nothing that we do, nor is it affected by how we “feel.”

“It’s not what you did,” He may say. “It’s what I did for you! You would have known that if you had studied My Word. At least you should have learned that from Bramlett’s book that I sent you.”

### **Is there a mysterious gimmick?**

Does God’s amazing grace (unmerited favor) and the privilege of conversation with God all sound too easy so far? You may be wondering, “Where’s the gimmick?”

Well, with God, there are no gimmicks. But God’s gift of grace and its benefits must be taken very seriously. It imposes on us an obligation even greater than one’s duty to nation, family, or anything else.

From privilege also comes responsibility.

In return for His “free” grace, what does God want from us? Could it be just an hour or so one day a week. Or at least attending a service on Easter, just to make Him feel better? Or maybe a dollar or two in an offering plate occasionally?

These are popular misconceptions. Actually, God doesn’t “need” our attendance anywhere, any of our money, or really anything. He is totally self-sufficient, and He owns the universe.

But He does *want* something from us, something far more substantive than the above. *He wants our lives!*

Sound scary? Does it sound like another one of those good news - bad news situations?

Well, maybe at first glance, but it's really all good news. The only reason He wants our lives is so that He can give us *His life* in return!

Remember, God is totally selfless, loving, and giving. Anything He wants from us is really designed for our ultimate good. He has even devised the ultimate gift—Himself! This gift was first manifested at the crucifixion (“*For God so loved... that He gave...*”) with a *general* gift for all humanity. Now it is the gift of His own Spirit, His very life, to each *specific* person individually.

Chapter 8 describes this new life that is implanted within us. Now we will discuss some of the practical applications of that wonderful principle and how our wills (which we still have) and actions should respond to God's love, allowing His *implanted* life to *supplant* our own.

**Grace vs. works.** Since Jesus was on the earth 2,000 years ago, church leaders, theologians, and other thinkers have contemplated and debated the relative importance and interrelationship of two great biblical principles:

1. God's *free gift* of grace  
versus
2. Humanity's *required response*.

Some seem to overemphasize and get out of balance on one, and some on the other. Too much emphasis on God's grace invites license and irresponsibility, one group says. Another group says that putting too much emphasis on man's response dishonors God and exalts man's ability.

Yet both are valid. God's grace is a free gift, but yes, there is a required, or expected, human response. However, there does seem to be a general agreement, and confirmed by my own study and experience, that because God is so great and we are so relatively weak, He must *enable* us to respond properly. His Spirit must prompt

us to recognize what He did in Christ. He must help us see the need for repentance and forgiveness. He must help us overcome temptation. He must help us to love other people. He must help us do whatever He wants us to do. As we learned in Chapter 8, the Holy Spirit is called the “Helper.”

Yet we still must respond, even with that help. But He is there to help us with a nudge, with encouragement, with the strength that we need. We do it together. Because of that we can respond. We do respond. Yes, we may still mess up sometimes, but He is there to help and restore us.

Ultimately, we act from our free will, but that action springs from an enlightened mind and heart. We are motivated to respond because:

1. Love begets love. Once we grasp the love of God and what He has done for us through the blood covenant, we are compelled to respond in kind. We desire to show our deep gratitude and to please Him.

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.<sup>4</sup>*

2. In spite of this love, we are still mindful of God's holiness and power. We are instructed to live “*with reverence and awe.*”<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul reminds us of both “*the kindness and sternness (KJV: severity) of God*”<sup>6</sup>—immeasurable kindness towards humanity, yet the severity of a loving Father when correction is needed.

### **Discipleship**

The above verse mentions no longer living for ourselves but for Him. Jesus made some rather hard and sobering statements about the cost of discipleship:

*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple...any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.<sup>7</sup>*

The word *disciple*, which comes from the same root as *discipline*, means a pupil, or adherent. To become a disciple means to commit oneself to follow Jesus. To “renounce” does not necessarily mean to arbitrarily dispose of possessions, but to renounce them as a priority, as their pull may interfere with commitment. Some who follow Jesus today, such as those in countries with tyrannical governments and cultures with religious repression, face persecution and death constantly because of their faith. In America and other nations with religious freedom, we have not been called to that sacrifice. But we should be willing if necessary, nor should we balk at smaller sacrifices, such as service within our church and the sharing of our time and resources as may be needed by others.

Can one be a party to the blood covenant and be anything less than a 100 percent committed, all-out disciple, renouncing everything? Scholars debate this. My own view is that since the blood covenant is a faith-produced contract, it stands alone as a tribute to God’s grace. The Bible is clear, however, that true faith will always result in corresponding action. But what percentage of our activity qualifies us to be called a disciple? Has any human truly reached 100 percent? Obviously not. In God’s perspective, it must be a matter of the heart attitude. Sometimes we fail, but God looks upon the heart. But our weakness must not be viewed as a copout. We are all undoubtedly capable of deeper degrees of commitment and response to God’s love and call. The Bible also reveals that there will be eternal rewards based on our response, though that should not be our motivation.

The world and popular opinion warn us against becoming “fanatics.” Face it, you will be considered an oddball if you make a sincere effort to follow Jesus, even though He is King of the universe. That is how twisted and perverted are the world’s values.

Of course, you will be considered quite normal in modern society if you freak out following a drug-using rock music star or a narcissistic Hollywood celebrity, or if you commit your life to most any other cause, such as sports, making money, or seeking political gain.

**The unusual advertisement.** People do, indeed, decide to sacrifice everything for all manner of temporal causes. Consider the British explorer early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who advertised for men to accompany him on an expedition to the South Pole. His ad read:

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful.

One would doubt that there would be any response at all. But surprisingly, men signed up from all over England, willing to sacrifice for what they viewed as a worthy cause. Compare that cause with serving the Creator who sacrificed Himself for our sakes. And our commitment can have eternal consequences.

**The young communist.** Or consider the young American college student who had been converted to communism. Billy Graham once shared a letter from the student to his fiancé, explaining why he had to break the engagement:

We communists have a high casualty rate. We live in virtual poverty, and turn back every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We communists don't have the time or the money for movies, concerts, or T-bone steaks or decent homes or new cars. I am in dead earnest. It is my life, my business, my religion, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes by. Therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I've already been in jail because of my ideas and if necessary I am ready to go before a firing squad.

**A great football coach.** The late Vince Lombardi was one of the greatest football coaches and motivators who ever lived. He

demanding total, fanatical commitment from a group of adult and educated men—commitment to simply a game to move a leather bag full of air (a football) up and down a grassy field. But he also related it to life:

The many hurts seem a small price to pay for having won, and there's no reason at all, which is adequate, for having lost. To the winner there is 100% elation, 100% laughter, 100% fun.... And it is a game, I think, that is a great deal like life in that it demands a man's personal commitment be toward excellence, and be toward victory.... it must be pursued with all of one's might.... And I want to say that the quality of any man's life has got to be a full measure of that man's personal commitment to excellence and to victory regardless of what field he may be in.

In view of humanity's proven ability for commitment to all manner of worthy and unworthy causes, is our Creator's request for commitment to Himself unreasonable? As to priorities, could there be any higher?

### **What God really wants from us**

As a creature aware of a loving and all-powerful Creator, we cry out, "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

Just the question is pleasing to God, because it speaks of our desire and willingness. And just the sincere question assures that the answer will be forthcoming.

One day a group of people asked Jesus basically the same question: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"

Jesus replied:

*The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.<sup>8</sup>*

**Step One.** In His reply, Jesus stressed the priority of *faith* before *action*. As described earlier, the word "believe" connotes the idea of trust and commitment. No human effort has eternal value outside of that which has been entrusted to and enabled by God Himself.

Believing and entrusting oneself to Christ not only triggers the gift of grace and eternal life but it is the precondition for accomplishing anything for God or anything with eternal value.

So we do that. Then what are we supposed to do?

**Step Two.** The Bible is full of laws, do's and don'ts. The Old Testament Torah (the first five books of the Bible, or books of Moses) has an elaborate system of 613 laws on dozens of subjects including, of course, the Ten Commandments. Some count a total of about 2,300 specific laws. Many were for a specific purpose in Hebrew history. Many were prophetic. Many contained eternal principles that are reiterated in the New Testament. However, we learn from the New Testament that Jesus fulfilled those old laws, that they all found embodiment and satisfaction in Him. The New Testament gives us a more brief and simple rule, although the old moral principles remain in force:

*This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.<sup>9</sup>*

(Jesus had previously said that the two greatest commandments in the Law of Moses were to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.)<sup>9A</sup>

Paul reiterates our Step Two:

*He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.<sup>10</sup>*

That is the summary of our obligation. It does not cancel the old moral commandments, but rather explains their basis in a broader sense.

Sound too easy? Just "love." Well, if you haven't discovered it yet, you will—it's the toughest assignment on earth—placing the

interest of others above our own, *always*. Complicating the process is the difficulty in always knowing what is best for others; we just don't always know. Love is not always "giving in," and sometimes requires not giving in. And try as hard as we may, we sometimes find ourselves failing even on the obvious things. No one has ever perfectly complied with the commandment to totally love God and others except Jesus Himself. This keeps us humble and constantly relying on God's grace to help us and not our own abilities.

We are also dependent upon His guidance and wisdom as we constantly face decisions regarding relationships with others which are too unique or specific to be found in a written code of law. Remember? The old covenant was simply keeping "external" rules, whereas the new covenant involves God's internal guidance in keeping with the "spirit" of the law in all situations. Those who are still trying to live under the old written law have a codified system of centuries of interpretations and opinions trying to cover every situation, which few have even read, much less understand or comply with. Plus, some 80 percent of those old laws are impossible to comply with because they required the old temple and priesthood, both of which disappeared almost 2,000 years ago.

Actually, there are many forms the above "love law" can take. The New Testament exhorts us about many things we should do and things we should avoid in order for our lives to be effective instruments for God. For example, we are instructed to help others, to be patient and kind, to pray, to bless and not curse our enemies, and avoid immorality, idolatry, jealousy, enmity, drunkenness, and other "works of the flesh," as they are called.

### **The mysterious church**

One activity that God has ordained and blessed for our participation in serving Him is the church. We are encouraged not to neglect "*meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*"<sup>11</sup>

God is corporate-minded. He sees us not only in union with



Himself but also with other believers, all functioning together in a mystical body that He inhabits and through which He operates. It is in the church that we find teaching, care, counsel, and the operation of spiritual gifts (talents, abilities, “manifestations of the Spirit”) for the “common good.” It is also the place where we can worship jointly, serve and be channels of these blessings for others. The functioning community of believers is very important and has high priority in the Scriptures.

There are mystical but very real and practical reasons for the church’s importance. Jesus said that whatever we do to others we do to Him. Somehow, as we relate to others, we relate to Him. He also promised a special presence whenever multiple believers get together in His name, and a special power when believers agree together for prayer needs.

Also, as with any group or purpose, there is a synergistic effect involved in unity—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Finally, unexplainable and positive “happenstances” occur as believers interrelate—sometimes surprise blessings from God through members of His Body.

You may be able to commune with God by yourself at home, in the woods, or while playing golf, and you should, but doing this as a substitute for Christian fellowship is not God’s plan or instruction as He has very specifically revealed.

**How does one pick a church?** It can appear confusing because there are so many churches and denominations and varieties of doctrine. How does one avoid getting involved with the “wrong kind,” such as a cult? It is both a difficult and an easy question.

First, pray and ask God to lead you. Leading you is His job. He will.

Second, recognize that no single church or group has a monopoly on all the truth. Different denominations and groups seem to emphasize different aspects of God’s truths. Rather than isolated pictures, together they are like a mosaic of the larger and beautiful pattern of Christ’s Body on earth. The most important thing is that their emphasis is on the One who referred to Himself as the embodiment of all truth—Jesus Christ.

Regardless of denomination, affiliation, or name, make sure that the particular church in which you may be interested has these essential ingredients:

1. Belief in the Bible as the inerrant, inspired Word of God.
2. Preeminence is given to Jesus Christ, His deity, His atoning blood sacrifice, and His actual presence in the church. All matters within the church, even the organization, should be subordinate to this cardinal truth, not just in word but in deed.
3. Belief that salvation is “by grace through faith” according to Ephesians 2:8-9 and not by human works, law-keeping, or church-related activity, including giving, although important.
4. The reality and power of the Holy Spirit are recognized.

There are individual churches in every historic denomination and many independent churches that meet the above criteria, and some that do not; name is no guarantee. A warning sign may be a persistent obsession with contemporary social/political issues popular with the media at the time (not to be confused with genuine social concern), rather than proclaiming God’s spiritual truths. Sadly, in recent years some historically Bible-believing and faithful churches have departed from the faith and have pastors who graduated from liberal seminaries who do not know what they believe, making you wonder what they are doing in that job or career. If they do not know the truth, they cannot teach it to others.

### **Beware of false cults**

Besides the usual churches one might encounter, there are many cults and false religions that have the trappings of Christianity but are deceptively and dangerously different. They even existed in the first century. Paul warned:

*Grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.<sup>12</sup>*

Here are some ways to test for a cult or heretical group. Use the three criteria above, plus one or more of the following may apply:

1. A cult will sometimes have its own book, in addition to the Bible, which it considers inspired. It will typically conflict with but

be given priority over the Bible. Lacking knowledge of the Bible's truths can make one a vulnerable candidate for any cult. God has a severe warning to anyone who adds to His book (Revelation 22:18).

2. Cults often center around one strong leader or founder who is typically autocratic, if still alive, or abnormally revered if not alive.

3. A cult or its leader or founder will often have the only "true" interpretation of Scripture, usually involving a particular doctrine around which the cult organizes and makes itself different from others.

4. Cults will typically ignore Bible truths that may contradict their tenets, or will take particular Bible truths and distort and overemphasize them beyond God's intent.

5. A cult is often "exclusive," considering outsiders as unsaved and not recognizing other believers in Christ as part of God's family.

6. Cults tend to impose a bondage of allegiance, instilling the fear that leaving their group will cause a loss of salvation.

7. Some modern cults are an offshoot of Eastern religions, teaching anti-biblical concepts such as reincarnation, Eastern meditation, and a "Christ spirit" or "universal spirit" within everyone, some even using Christian names. It is a play on semantics. They are not talking about the same Christ. Modern cultism also includes so-called "New Age" groups that are flourishing that are actually "occult" in nature—stressing such things as spiritism and psychic phenomenon. These offer counterfeit spirituality, and a horrible danger—missing the real thing.

8. Cults will often force involuntary servitude to their group or leader, perhaps as "evidence" of one's sincerity or salvation, whereas Christ wants us to voluntarily serve Him out of a right motivation.

Christians have an obligation to God, as previously discussed. However, there is still a wonderful freedom in Christ and in a believer's walk in the Holy Spirit. It is not a freedom to sin, but a freedom to serve Him out of a heart of love and without the bondages that humans often impose on one another.

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.<sup>10</sup>*

## Chapter 10

# The Mysterious Disappearance

This is about the most mysterious object and the most mysterious disappearance in history.

The famous “ark of the covenant,” sometimes called “ark of the testimony,” was the subject of the popular 1981 movie, “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” starring Harrison Ford. While mostly fictitious, a truth of the movie is that there really was an ark and that it really was lost!

This chapter is not about Noah’s ark, a boat. This is about a box, also called an ark. Both arks were part of God’s plan and have great meaning. Both symbolize the salvation of God and both His judgment and His mercy.

The fate of this ark is a great mystery. That is because there has never been a man-made object or artifact that has been as revered as the ark of the covenant. God Himself gave it special protection.

Then all of a sudden—whoosh!—it was gone, lost in history.

What happened to it?

I will describe some of the top theories as to its whereabouts, then tell you where it actually may be and maybe why it has never been found! You will be amazed at the answer.

### **The background**

The ark was a relatively small wooden chest 3.75' long, 2.25' wide, and 2.25' high. God directed Moses to construct it in about 1491 B.C. Its purpose was to contain the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. According Hebrews 9:4 in the New Testament, the ark originally contained two other items: a golden pot of manna, a food that God miraculously provided to the children of Israel (Exodus 16:32–34); and Aaron's rod (or staff) that budded to prove that Aaron was God's chosen (Numbers 17:1–11).

The ark had a golden lid called the Mercy Seat (Hebrew for "cover"). It was placed in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle where God manifested His special presence.<sup>1</sup> Only the high priest could enter this awesome place.

The high priest entered with sacrificial blood to sprinkle on the Mercy Seat. He represented all the people outside who depended on this procedure to remove the guilt of their sins. There is great prophetic significance to this and why God would only reveal Himself above the Mercy Seat, or "cover."

The tablets of the Ten Commandments (the law) within the ark were constantly before God's presence testifying to the guilt of all the people. They represented God's holiness and perfect standard of behavior. But the blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat "covered" and negated these accusations, even before reaching God.

This blood "covering" was a prophetic symbol of the true *Lamb*, the Messiah, who was to come in the future and shed His own blood to "cover" the sins of all people everywhere. When applied, Messiah's blood covers and cancels the accusations of the law against a person. The law is eternal, and its accusations are correct and true against every human who ever lived. No one has ever complied with it perfectly; however, the blood covering invalidates the charges by shielding them from God. Because of the blood, He never even hears the accusations. It is as though they don't even exist.

It has been vividly described in this way. In effect and symbolically, the Commandments inside the ark are continuously

declaring to God concerning the people, “They are guilty! They are guilty!”

But the blood on the mercy seat was, in effect, always answering back, “Shut up! Shut up!”

Such an action is not arbitrary or without logic or rationale. The blood covering shows that the penalty has already been paid. The penalty for violating God’s law is death, the Bible says. The blood covering represents that death. The Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) paid that penalty for every human by His substitutionary sacrifice for our sakes. (See Chapter 5.) Jesus is the eternal high priest who entered the Holy of Holies of heaven representing all people of all nations. He placed His own blood on the Mercy Seat before God as our “covering.” His blood silences the accusations of the law against us. To the 24/7 accusations of the law against us, Jesus’ blood is always shouting back 24/7, “Shut up! Shut up!” The Supreme Judge of the universe declares forever “not guilty” those who place their faith in Him.

The above is included to demonstrate the awesome importance and significance of the ark of the covenant and why it is such a mystery. It was treated with the utmost fear and respect. On one occasion an unauthorized person touched it when he was not supposed to, then fell dead.<sup>2</sup> God required his life. It was so holy that absolutely no mistakes were to be made regarding its handling and use. God is not unkind, but with these things pertaining to redemption and the blood of the covenant, He required great discipline of His chosen people.

### **What happened to the ark?**

The ark was used by the Israelites for hundreds of years and suddenly it was no longer mentioned in history. Scholars believe that it was lost when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C. But what was its fate? Was it destroyed, or was it kept and hidden by its captors? Or did something else happen? Because it was so holy, would God actually allow its desecration and destruction?

Because it was so revered, it is very strange that no one mentioned it again. And, of course, it reportedly has never been found by

archaeologists. It has been a great mystery for over 2,500 years.

**Popular theories.** The whereabouts of the ark is not without many opinions, theories, and speculations. Below are some of the more popular ideas where it may be:

1. Some claim the ark is presently known by Israeli authorities to be in a tunnel beneath the historic Temple Mount in Jerusalem, hidden there by temple priests just before the Babylonian invasion. A Muslim mosque currently sits on that site and they say the ark cannot presently be revealed due to the sensitive political situation. Orthodox Jews have, in fact, already made specific plans for a new temple on that historically Jewish site—the Third Temple—and the ark supposedly will be brought forth at the appropriate time. But if revealed now, they say, Muslims would go ballistic at the suggestion their mosque would be destroyed and replaced by a temple for the Jews. Muslims even deny that the Jews ever occupied that piece of real estate, sacred land the use of which goes back about 4,000 years in Jewish history, whereas Islam itself only goes back about 1,400 years, with no interest in that area until years later.

2. In his 1988 book, *Armageddon: Appointment With Destiny*, author Grant R. Jeffrey claims to document that the ark has been in Ethiopia since Solomon's day, taken there by Solomon's son from the Queen of Sheeba, Menelik, to preserve it during a time of apostasy in Israel. In its place, the book says that Menelik left behind a replica. Jeffrey provides some interesting documentation, with photos. (It is possible, of course, that Menelik unknowingly took a replica himself.) By the way, black Jews comprise a large community in Ethiopia, referred to as Beta Israel (the house of Israel), and many have emigrated to Israel. Operation Solomon, a two-day Israeli airlift of 14,310 Ethiopian Jews to the Holy Land, occurred in May 1991. This is all very interesting history. This aliyah (emigration of Jews to Israel) is part of a modern-day, world-wide phenomenon foretold by the ancient prophets, such as Ezekiel, when he wrote to "the house of Israel" about something that never happened until the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land (36:24).*

This Ethiopian connection reminds us of the story in the New Testament about the Ethiopian eunuch visiting Jerusalem to worship and was encountered by Philip, as recorded in the book of Acts, chapter 8.

3. Author and publisher J.R. Church of *Prophecy in the News* magazine also has said that the ark has been in Ethiopia, but Church believes the ark was taken there through Egypt and a different route by exiled Jews.

4. The apocryphal book, 2 Maccabees, chapter 2, verses 4-8, records that the prophet Jeremiah hid the ark in a cave on Mount Nebo, the place where Moses had been allowed by God to look into the Promised Land. The passage says that Jeremiah's companions later went back to mark the location but could not find it. It is recorded that Jeremiah then made a most interesting prophetic statement:

*The place shall remain unknown until God finally gathers His people together and shows mercy to them. Then the Lord will bring these things to light again, and the glory of the Lord will appear with the cloud...*

While 2 Maccabees is not generally accepted or canonized as inspired Scripture, it does not mean the information about the ark is necessarily incorrect. That reported prophecy by Jeremiah is intriguing, especially since God has been gathering His people Israel together in the land for the past few decades for the first time in almost 2,000 years.

5. Some believe the Roman Catholic Church has the ark hidden in the Vatican, but I am not aware of any evidence of this.

6. The most bizarre claim is that of the late archeologist Ron Wyatt, who claimed that he found the ark while digging beneath Golgotha where Jesus was crucified. Below the location of the cross, he claimed, is a crack in the rock structure through which Jesus'



blood seeped, and blood was found on the Mercy Seat below, where it had dripped. DNA tests reportedly show the blood to be a person without a human father, which of course would have been the virgin-born Jesus, the Lamb of God. If the ark is there, Israeli authorities probably know about it. This is a fascinating claim, believed by many, but frankly I do not know whether or not it is credible. Wyatt's materials are available at Wyatt Archeological Research, Inc. in Cornersville, Tennessee.

**The Islamic Mahdi.** Some Islamic scholars believe that when their messianic figure, the Mahdi, comes, he will locate the ark. According to a leading Islamic authority, "The coming of the Mahdi is established doctrine for both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, and indeed for all humanity." One Islamic source states that the discovery of the ark will help the Mahdi win converts from both Christianity and Judaism prior to "eradicating" the remainder who do not convert to Islam, a part their plan of world conquest. Some Christian scholars believe this Mahdi may be the antichrist of the Bible, or connected with him. If so, that explains the "eradication" attempt probably during the Great Tribulation prophesied in the Bible to occur at the end of the age. At this writing, a top Muslim leader in the Middle East believes the Mahdi will arrive in the very near future.

### **A heavenly possibility?**

There is one more interesting and compelling possibility. All the above theories notwithstanding, I may have discovered the actual location of the famous ark! If so, it is cared for, specially preserved, and in absolutely perfect condition.

What is this location?

Are you ready?

I have evidence that the ark is actually located in— heaven!

This is not just a personal opinion. I discovered it in the Bible. I was shocked when I found this, but it's very clear. The Book of Revelation tells us:

*God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.<sup>3</sup>*

How did it get there? It could have been literally “taken up” into heaven the same way that Enoch<sup>4</sup> and later Elijah<sup>5</sup> were suddenly taken up from earth to heaven.

The ark just might be in heaven, right now, and not just later! That would explain why it has been considered “lost” and why it is such a mystery. No wonder it hasn’t been found. Maybe it wasn’t meant to be found.

One of the above theories 1 through 6 may also be correct, but even so, I know we will eventually see it in heaven.

Even if there are claims that the ark has been found, we may never know if it is the original, genuine ark, or only a replica, as Jeffrey posits in his book mentioned above.

I once shared this opinion of the ark’s whereabouts with a friend who had an advanced degree in biblical studies. He replied, “But I always thought that verse was metaphorical and not literal.”

I said, “Well, maybe, but I’ll tell you what. Let’s just see. I’ll bet you that when you get to heaven you will find the ark there just like it says.” He didn’t have an answer or take the bet. Of course, I was joking about a bet, but it made my point. I have no reason to suspect that the description is not literal. I know we will see the ark in heaven.

Why would God take the ark and its contents directly to heaven, or why will we eventually find it there? Well, no one knows, but I have a good idea. First, I believe it is because the ark and its contents, the tablets of the Ten Commandments, are so sacred. But more importantly, I believe it is God’s plan for the presence of the ark to be an eternal testimony for the citizens of heaven—a testimony of the eternal blood covenant. It will be a reminder that He gave His own blood to “cover” the accusations of the law against His people. Not a bad reminder.

I hope it is there, for whatever reason. I want to see it. Then I want to say, “Thank you, Lord, for all that you did for us. It’s really great to be here.”

See you there, dear reader! Really, I’m counting on meeting you. Look for me. I’ll be the one with the big grin.

Be sure and tell me you read this book!

My scriptural prayer for you:

*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*<sup>6</sup>

# Appendix 1

## How to be Born Again and Assured of Heaven

**Introduction.** In John 3:7, Jesus made this very pointed and emphatic statement, “*You must be born again,*” not caring whether or not some modern-day people or denominations would like the phrase and His wording. They are the carefully chosen, eternal words of the omniscient Son of God.

Absolutely nothing is more important in life than being born again of the Spirit of God, knowing Him personally, being saved from eternal death and judgment, knowing for sure that you are going to heaven, and experiencing God’s pardon, purpose, peace, power. These are free—all a blessing of grace (unmerited favor) provided by the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrew: Yeshua haMeschiah).

This is the “gospel,” which literally means “good news.” It truly is “the most joyful news ever announced,” as the angels proclaimed at His birth some 2,000 years ago.

Some say that this free gift of grace offered by God is too good to be true. Well, it is good, and it is true. Only an infinitely loving and all-powerful God could have conceived of this! Others say that all this surely cannot be free, and we have to add something to it. Cults

and non-Christian religions always try to add to it, an offense to God and what His Son did. There is nothing we can add to His great sacrifice.

Why did God do it? Because He loves you, and He wants you to spend eternity with Him in heaven. Don't miss out!

### Steps to salvation

**God's love.** The Bible reveals that God loves you very much, so much so that He paid the ultimate price for you. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). Jesus also said, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

**Man's separation from God.** God is holy, perfect, and pure. Humans are sinful and imperfect. We are separated from God; thus, we cannot know Him without His intervention. *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). In this state we would be separated from Him forever, in spiritual darkness, in a place or state of existence the Bible calls hell.

**God's solution. God is perfect justice.** He cannot violate His own attributes, one of which is perfect justice. But He is also perfect love, and He longs to bless us and fellowship with us. Did God have a dilemma? No, because His perfect wisdom combined with His perfect love to provide a perfect solution. He would send His Son Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins. *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). *"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).

**Our decision!** It is not enough to just know the above, we must individually *receive* Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord before we can experience the blessings and benefits of what He did for us, including forgiveness and eternal life. *“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12). *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**Jesus is speaking to you today.** He says, *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me”* (Revelation 3:20).

The Bible says that we must *repent*, which means to “turn,” or change direction. Turn from your life of unbelief to belief, from a life of disregarding God to one of recognizing and honoring Him, from a life of willful sin (disobedience) to a life of obedience, as God shows you and with His help.

You can receive Him right now by a simple but sincere prayer. Here is a suggested prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God, that you died on the cross for my sins, and that you rose from the grave. I ask you to forgive my sins, and I invite you into my heart to be my Lord and Savior. Take control of my life and help me to be what you want me to be. By faith, I now thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Amen.

See Appendix 2 for further information about the wonderful benefits of God’s grace and what to do now.

## Appendix 2

# Eight Incomparable Benefits of Trusting Christ

From history's beginning, through prophets and events, the Creator revealed His loving plan to rescue the human race from its self-imposed curse of sin and death. He would do this by sending His Son, who would become a sacrificial Lamb, taking the judgment upon Himself for all who would put their trust in Him. This profound event happened almost 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, came, was crucified, rose from the grave, seen by more than 500 people, and 40 days later visibly ascended into heaven.

When you put your trust in Christ and commit your life to Him, you become a recipient of the greatest gifts in the universe, including the below, free to us but fully paid for by the blood of God's own Son.

1. **You have total forgiveness.** All your sins past, present, and future were forgiven because Jesus bore them for you on the cross. You are accepted by God, not because of what you have done, but because of what He did! *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

2. **You have peace with God.** *"Therefore, since we have been*

*justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.... Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"* (Romans 5:1,5,9). For Jewish readers, this first appearance of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ in English), as a sacrificial Lamb, was predicted throughout Jewish Scriptures. For example, see Isaiah, chapter 53. You cannot rely on animal blood shed 2,000 to 3,500 years ago.

**3. You have been "born again" into God's own family.** You are a new creature! *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:26).

**4. You have eternal life.** You will live with God in His paradise kingdom forever! *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). *"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son"* (1 John 5:11).

**5. God lives in you.** You have become a temple, or dwelling place, of God's Spirit. He lives inside of you! *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16). *"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2:20).

**6. Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ!** *"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39).

**7. God has chosen to share His kingdom with you!** *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom"* (Luke 12:32). *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory"* (Romans 8:17).



**8. All of God's promises are for you!** You have access to all of God's many promises as contained in His Word. They are all for you, free and paid for by the blood of Jesus. *"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God"* (2 Corinthians 1:20). They are "yes" in Christ and are all available to you, but you must say the "amen," that is, believe them, confess them, and claim them as your own.

Have you prayed yet and expressed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ? If not, see Appendix 1.

**"But what does God want from me now?"**

If you have prayed that or a similar prayer, that is probably your question, and a natural one. But remember, God is all-powerful and owns the universe. He really does not need anything we have. But He does *want* something. He desires our love and fellowship. He created us for fellowship with Himself and to enjoy Him forever. Christianity is really not a "religion" as many people think, but a "relationship."

Of course, God also wants our obedience and submission to His superior wisdom, but mainly for our own good and so that He can use us to be a blessing to others. His ways are never arbitrary and are always for a loving purpose. Below are some principles from God's Word that will strengthen your relationship with Him, help you to be a more effective servant, and help you to receive all the blessings that our loving God has for you.

**Talk with God continually.** That is what prayer is conversation with God. It includes listening, always in tune to His Spirit, at home, at work, at school, or wherever. In Jesus' name, we have the incredible privilege of communicating directly with the Creator of the universe anytime, day or night! No appointment necessary. *"Pray continually,"* we are exhorted in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. See Chapter 9.

**Read His Word, the Bible.** God will speak to you through His Word. You will learn more about His nature, His ways, and His will,

plan, purposes and promises for your life. It will help understand His book if you better know the Author. The Gospel of John is a good place to start. A modern translation and a good commentary will help understanding. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"* (Psalm 119:105). *"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life"* (John 6:63). See Chapter 1.

**Obey Him.** Our obedience demonstrates our love for God and recognition of who He is. *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him"* (John 14:21).

God's Word tells us not to sin, which grieves God, hinders our fellowship with Him, and harms ourselves and others. God wants us to live holy lives, becoming more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). If you do sin, confess it immediately, then (by faith) receive God's forgiveness and cleansing according to 1 John 1:9. One of your first acts of obedience should be to be baptized in water, a demonstration that your old nature has been buried with Christ and that, coming out of the water, you have risen with Him in His resurrection. Baptism is usually done in the local church.

**Find fellowship with other believers.** Our relationship and fellowship with other believers (the Body of Christ) are important to God. That is why He established the church, where we can not only worship together but find fellowship, teaching, counseling, ministry to our special needs, and where God can use each of us to impart these same blessings to others. *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25). Find a Christ-centered, Bible-believing church where the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are recognized. But beware of cults, which typically deny the deity of Christ; insist that works, not just grace, are required for salvation; are often centered around one founder whose writings take precedence over the Bible; and sometimes will have their own book, claimed to be sacred, in addition to the Bible. Remember, God says in Revelation 22:18-19:

*“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”*

**“Be filled with the Spirit,”** God exhorts us in Ephesians 5:18. This means to be continually empowered for God’s use and a victorious life by His Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). We receive this empowering *by faith*.

You have now entered the most exciting and fulfilling life imaginable! Learn to trust God with every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7); tell others about God’s great love and “good news” (John 15:8); walk in the Spirit and do not give in to your old carnal desires (Galatians 5:16,17); and be aware of spiritual warfare and God’s prescription for continuous victory over Satan (Ephesians 6:10-18).

## Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Other translations used are as indicated:

KJV (*King James Version*, Public Domain).

JBP (*Phillip's Modern English* version by J. B. Phillips, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.).

### Introduction

1. St. Augustine, Letter 137, A.D. 412.

2. *The Columbia History of the World*, (New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1972). Sir Isaac Newton wrote *The Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John*. The 1733 book was discovered in the Library of Congress by Dr. Arthur B. Robinson of Cave Junction, Oregon, and reprinted by the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, 2251 Dick George Road, Cave Junction, Oregon 97523. This original book was Thomas Jefferson's personal copy as revealed by his initials on pages 57 and 137. (September 1991, Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 91-074116, ISBN 0-942487-02-8).

3. Proverbs 8:10.

### Chapter 1

1. Galatians 6:7.

2. Ezekiel 26:3-21.
3. Isaiah 66:8
4. W. A. Criswell, *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True*, (Nashville, TN, Broadman Press, 1969), page 45.
5. Luke 24:25.
6. John 14:26.
7. Isaiah 40:22.
8. Leviticus 17:11.
9. Ibid, Sir Isaac Newton's *The Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John*, page ix. Excellent sources of facts relating to the reliability of the Bible are: *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992) (also, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 1999); *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Faith*, Lee Stroebel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, 2000 respectively); *What If The Bible Had Never Been Written?* D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998); and *Why I Preach the Bible is Literally True*, W.A. Criswell (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969).
- 9A. Hanson, James N. 1996. "Newton Was Not an Arian", *Biblical Astronomer* 6(75):31-32 (Winter 1996).
10. For information on the works of Dr. Ivan Panin, contact Bible Numerics, 81 Bayview Ridge, Toronto ON Canada M2L 1E3 (last known address).
11. Jerry Lucas and Dale Washburn, *Theomatics*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1977).
12. George W. Cornell, Associated Press wire, quoted in *The Virginian-Pilot*, Norfolk, VA, August 16, 1986 (source of information on "Elohim" and "Torah").
13. 2 Timothy 3:16.
14. Some of these historic quotes came from file and some came from the book by William J. Federer, *America's God and Country* (Coppell, Texas, FAME Publishing, Inc., 1994).
15. John 6:63.
16. Proverbs 4:20-22.

## Chapter 2

1. Deuteronomy 6:4, KJV.
2. Genesis 1:1, KJV.
3. Genesis 1:26, KJV.
4. Isaiah 7:14.
5. Isaiah 6:9.
6. John 14:26.
7. John 15:26.
8. John 10:30.
9. John 14:9.
10. Colossians 1:15-20.
11. John 5:23.
12. Judson Cornwall, *Let Us Come Together* (Power Publications, 1983).
13. Matthew 12:34
14. Luke 10:22.
15. John 14:6.
16. 1 Corinthians 12:3.

## Chapter 3.

1. *One Solitary Life*, author unknown.
2. Luke 24:27.
3. John 8:58 (He referred to Himself as “I am,” as He did in Exodus 3:14).
4. John 14:9.
5. Matthew 9:6.
6. Matthew 5:21-48.
7. Mark 8:31.
8. John 20:28.
9. Luke 21:27.
10. Matthew 25:31-46.
11. John 3:16.
12. John 14:6.
13. John 2,11; Matthew 8,14, and many others.
14. I Corinthians 15:6.
15. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: The MacMillan

Company, 1952), page 45.

16. Frank Mead, *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.).

17. John 14:6.

17A. Matthew 28:18.

18. Ephesians 1:9-1, JBP.

19. Editorial, *The Virginian-Pilot*, Norfolk, VA. Date unavailable.

20. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, NJ, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977), page 31.

21. Phyllis Mackall, *God's Plantation*, research paper, unpublished, quoting from *A True and Sincere Declaration of the Purpose and Ends of the Plantation Begun in Virginia*, 1610, the Virginia Company."

22. C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Phillipsburg, N, J: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), page 45.

23. Marshall Foster and Mary-Elaine Swanson, *The American Covenant, the Untold Story* (Thousand Oaks. CA: The Foundation for Christian Self-Government), page 13.

24. Ibid., page 99-100.

25. Ibid., Page 69.

26. Dr. Creflo Dollar, pastor, World Changers Church International. Sermon, December 11, 2005.

#### **Chapter 4**

1. Romans 16:25-26, KJV.

2. 1 Peter 1:10-12.

3. Isaiah 7:14, KJV.

4. Isaiah 9:6, KJV.

5. Isaiah 53:3, 5, 7, 10, KJV.

6. Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1958), pages 11-15.

7. John 1:35.

#### **Chapter 5**

1. Josephus, *The Jewish War* (New York: Dorset Press, 1959), page 372.

2. A classic work on this subject is *The Blood Covenant*, by H. Clay Trumbull, a late 19th Century book. A copy can be obtained from Impact Books, Inc., 133 West Jefferson, Kirkwood, MO 63122.

3. Romans 3:2.

4. Leviticus 17:11, KJV.

5. Revelation 1:5, KJV.

6. 1 John 1:7, KJV.

7. Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

8. Genesis 17:2.

9. Genesis 17:9, 14.

10. Hebrews 9:15-18.

11. Matthew 26:26.

12. For detailed and fascinating explanations of symbolisms of the Messiah in the Passover traditions, the following books are recommended: *The Miracle of the Scarlet Thread*, by Richard Booker, Bridge Publishing Company, South Plainfield, NJ, 1981, and *Christ in the Passover*, by Ceil and Moishe Rosen, Moody Press, Chicago, 1978.

13. Matthew 26:27-28.

14. 1 Corinthians 11:25.

15. John 6:53-54.

16. Genesis 3:21.

17. John 3:16; Hebrews 13:20.

18. Exodus 25, Leviticus 16, and Hebrews 9.

19. John 3:16.

20. 1 Peter 1:18-19.

21. Hebrews 9:22.

## **Chapter 6**

1. 2 Corinthian 5:19-20.

2. Nineteenth century hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, by Reginald Heber and John B. Dykes.

3. Isaiah 53:5, 7, 11.

4. John 3:16.

5. Philippians 3:9.

6. Hymn, *Amazing Grace*, by John Newton, 1779.



## **Chapter 7**

1. Exodus 20:7.
2. Proverbs 30:4, KJV.
3. Isaiah 42:8 (literal).
4. Exodus 3:15.
5. John 17:26, KJV.
6. Psalms 22:22, KJV.
7. Psalms 103:1 (literal).
8. Psalms 8:1 (literal).
9. Psalms 34:3.
10. Psalms 68:4 (literal).
11. Song of Solomon 1:3, KJV.
12. Psalms 5:11, KJV.
13. Deuteronomy 32:2-3 literal.

## **Chapter 8**

1. Hebrews 10:16.
2. 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- 2A. Dr. Michael Landsman, *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Bridge Publishing, South Plainfield, NJ, 1994).
3. 1 Corinthians 6:17.
4. 1 Corinthians 6:19.
5. Colossians 1:27.
6. Galatians 2:20, KJV.
7. John 14:16-17.
8. Hebrews 13:5, KJV.
9. John 14:17.
10. Acts 1:8.
11. Galatians 5:22-23.
12. 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
13. 1 Corinthians 2:9.
14. John 17:24.
15. John 14:2-3, KJV.
16. Revelation 21:27.
17. Revelation 19:13.
18. Revelation 5:9-10.

19. Revelation 5:13.
20. Acts 1:9-11.
21. Zechariah 12:1, 2, 3.
22. Luke 21:27-28.
23. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.
24. Titus 2:13-14.
25. Romans 8:24-25.
26. Proverbs 16:32, KJV.
27. 1 Peter 2:11.
28. Galatians 5:17.
29. Romans 6:11-12.
30. Romans 7:24-25.
31. Ephesians 6:12.
32. 1 John 5:4.
33. Revelation 12:11.

### **Chapter 9**

1. Matthew 27:51.
2. John 14:6.
3. Hebrews 11:6.
4. 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15.
5. Hebrews 12:28.
6. Romans 11:22.
7. Luke 14:27, 33.
8. John 6:28-29.
9. 1 John 3:23.
- 9A. Matthew 22:37-40
10. Romans 13:8-10.
11. Hebrews 10:25.
12. Acts 20:29.
13. Galatians 5:13.

### **Chapter 10**

1. Exodus 25:22.
2. 2 Samuel 6:7.
3. Genesis 5:24.
4. 2 Kings 2:11.
5. Revelation 11:19.
6. Hebrews 13:20.